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# **the Soul of the Black Preacher**

**BY BISHOP JOSEPH A. JOHNSON, JR.**

**A PILGRIM PRESS BOOK  
PHILADELPHIA**

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 70-162411  
ISBN 0-8298-0193-6

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"Jesus, the Liberator" originally appeared as a paper in *Andover Newton Quarterly Review*, Vol. X (3), January 1970.

To  
Joseph Andrew Johnson, Sr.  
1883—1957  
a faithful and dedicated minister  
of the  
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church  
for more than fifty years

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## PREFACE

Black theology, the quest for black identity, black history and studies, and a new appreciation of the glorious black Christian experience form the matrix out of which these sermons and lectures were written. They were delivered to audiences during the late sixties and represent an attempt on the part of the writer to present a meaningful interpretation of the significance of the Christian faith for the witnessing, worshiping black community. They were written and delivered with the belief that black theology is the most significant movement in theology during the past 100 years and that the black Christian experience which forms the data for theological thinking will provide new insights into the meaning of the Christian faith.

The black Christian experience in America is basically an experience of repression and oppression, but it is also a glorious experience in that it has given to black Americans a tough and rugged faith, a new understanding of the meaning of love, universal compassion, soul, identity, and the courage to be. An understanding of this experience gives to black theology its essential emphasis: the recognition and appreciation of black humanity, of black liberation, black history, and black power.

These sermons and lectures represent an attempt on the part of the author to understand what the Christian faith has to say about the condition of black Americans. What does the Christian faith say to Blacks living in a society dominated by racism? What does the Christian faith say about black humanity and black liberation? What is the role and function of Jesus to and for black liberation and reconciliation? What ideas of God must be developed and preached so that God is understood as he who says, "Let my people go"? These are a few of the questions which were in the mind of the author as he developed the sermons and lectures in this book.

Trained in white American seminaries in the tradition of Whitehead-Wieman in philosophy and theology and in the tradition of Dibelius-Bultmann in New Testament studies, the writer has been made painfully aware that neither of these traditions had anything significant to say about black humanity and black liberation. The writer was forced to go back to the Bible and especially the New Testament and address to it a whole new set of questions. He has been compelled to study again with a new passion and interest black history and culture, black literature, black spirituals and black blues, and to accept many of the insights of the new interpreters of the black experience.

These sermons and lectures have come out of the soul of a black preacher, one who is committed to the Christian faith and one who

believes that Jesus is the Liberator and Savior of men. The sermon-lecture "The Soul of the Black Preacher" was delivered to ministers who attended the ministers' institutes in the states of Mississippi and Louisiana, Mississippi Industrial College and Grambling College respectively, 1968. The sermon "Jesus, the Word of Life" (revised) was delivered at the General Connectional Board of the C. M. E. Church, St. Louis, Missouri, 1967. "Conflict, Challenge, Defeat, Victory" (revised) was delivered at district conferences in Mississippi and Louisiana, 1968. The sermon-addresses "The Triumphant Adequacy of Jesus," "Wholeness Through Jesus Christ," and "Jesus, the Leader" (revised), were delivered at Boston University, 1968. The latter sermon was also delivered at the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal, Canada, 1963. "The Principle of Identical Harvest" and "Man's Helplessness and the Power of Christ" are centennial sermons delivered at Mississippi Industrial College, Holly Springs, Mississippi and Williams Memorial C. M. E. Temple, Shreveport, Louisiana, 1969. The lecture "Jesus, the Liberator" was delivered at Andover Newton Theological Seminary during the Autumn Convocation, 1969. "The Christian's Call, Commitment, and Commission," "All Is of Grace and Grace Is for All," and "Even We Have Believed in Jesus Christ" were Bible studies based on Galatians 1 and 2, delivered at the Consultation on Church Union in Dayton, Ohio, 1968. The address "The Imperative of Beyondness" was delivered at the Quadrennial Youth Conference, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Birmingham, Alabama, July, 1969. "The Christian Faith and the Black Experience" is a revision of a lecture entitled "The Legitimacy of Black Theology" delivered at Phillips School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia, 1969 and Eden Theological Seminary, Webster Groves, Missouri, 1970. "Jesus, the Emancipator" was delivered at Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana, 1970, and "Jesus, the Disturber" was delivered at Harvard University, March, 1971.

Many persons have assisted in the preparation of my manuscript, especially my secretaries, Miss Dorothy E. Stone and Miss Doris Jean Bennett. My devoted wife, Grace Leon, has been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration; and my children Joseph III, Charles DeWitt, and Patricia Ann who always insist that I "tell it like it is, Daddy." A word of appreciation to Dr. C. D. Coleman without whose encouragement, insistence and criticism these sermons and addresses would not have left my hands.

This book is dedicated to my father, the late Rev. Joseph A. Johnson, Sr. who for more than one-half century served as a minister in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and taught me the true meaning of the Soul of a Black Preacher.

Joseph A. Johnson, Jr.



## INTRODUCTION

Moving across the pages of history almost unnoticed by historians, was one of the most colorful and dynamic figures ever to illuminate American folklore. Alternately revered and ridiculed, this renowned hero prototyped a noble and gifted breed—the “black preacher.”

For generations, armed only with the grace of God and the unique qualities of the gifts of blackness, this spiritual paladin spawned a theology which enabled the woebegone black masses to transcend the vicissitudes of life, however terrifying; to trace the sunshine through the rain and look upon the world with quiet eyes and tranquil souls. In days when hope unborn had died, it was the black preacher who gave a point of view that became a door of promise. When the total environment conspired to rob black people of humanity and the distresses of racism dinned into their minds and spirits that as a human being they were of no significance, it was the black preacher who saved their souls and sanity with an unadulterated interpretation of the sonhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

To the despondent masses who lived by faith, he gave realism and substance to things hoped for and a taste of things not seen. He was part of the travails of his people, for whatever happened to them happened to him also. Wherever they were, he was there . . . kneeling on the cold dirt floor of a slave cabin . . . working in the hot, dusty fields . . . walking the lonely wilderness trails to get to his church and people.

Man of God by calling—but often teacher, healer, carpenter, and undertaker by necessity. It was he who took down the mutilated bodies of black men after the mobs had done their worst. It was he who represented black people to a hostile white community in times of deep trouble. He did this, not for pay, not for glory, but only to serve. He made life a little less tedious and the hard journey a little less arduous. When a child was born, he was there to bless and cheer . . . when death came close, he was there to guide and comfort . . . when food and hope ran low, he was there to bring faith and assurance. He knew fear and loneliness, pain and trouble as intimately and as often as any of his flock; but from his lips always fell words of comfort and reassurance. His bones were just as numb and his muscles just as tired and sore—yet he went among his people serene and calm and cheerful. For that was his calling—and following his calling he helped to save a people.

No one will ever know how many times he was the quiet anonymous force and courage behind black men whose deeds fill the

pages of our heritage. No one can ever fully measure the part his presence played in saving the race, and laying and preserving the moral foundations of our way of life. In pursuit of his call he was frequently without the necessities of life, but never without the dignity of his office. He was often without honor, but never without integrity. He was a poet—his sermons compare with the finest prose and poetry. The wonderful creativity behind his preaching created the scene out of which spirituals were born. He was a philosopher—out of his soul came forth profound spiritual insights. He was an orator—his words held his audiences spellbound. He was a prophet—always declaring “a better day is coming.” This rare breed remains unheralded in the annals of history, but their names are written in the book of life.

Fortunately for all, this tradition is still with us today—not kneeling on the cold dirt floors of slave cabins, but in the overcrowded ghettos and run-down rat-infested shacks. No longer in the hot, dusty fields of southern plantations, but in the hot, smoky steel mills and foundries. No longer worshiping in busy harbors and fields, but in storefronts and cathedrals. The new breed can be found today in the forefront of the fight for liberation and empowerment. They are in black caucuses and coalitions. In the tradition of the past these modern paladins are found wherever wrong reaches for justice, wherever the poor seek jobs and food, and wherever oppressed people cry out their hurt. They are there confronting a denuded society with the burning truth, relentless love, and righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, the Liberator.

This is the tradition of the black preacher. This is his call—and to this calling he bares his soul.

C. D. Coleman  
General Secretary  
Board of Christian Education  
Christian Methodist  
Episcopal Church



# 1

## THE SOUL OF THE BLACK PREACHER

In your patience possess ye your souls. KJV

By standing firm you will win true life for yourselves. NEB

Hold out steadfast and you win your souls. MOFFATT <sup>1</sup>

By your endurance you will gain your lives. RSV

—Luke 21:19

Jesus warns his disciples concerning the approaching danger and the hostility of both Jew and gentile as they attempt to carry out their ministry. They will be accused of heresy and of sedition. They will be persecuted. They will be forsaken. They will be cast into prison. Jesus is a realist and he did not seduce his disciples by holding before them the pleasant prospect of a successful ministry. He lifts the veil and insists that his disciples face the dark realities, the fiery persecutions, and the struggles in which Christianity was to be cradled and baptized. He reminds the disciples of the ultimate danger which the Christian faith placed upon them and of the inevitability of the cross which is an indispensable and inescapable part of their own lives. They were in a real sense his followers and being such they were called upon to share in his sufferings. Through it all he assures them of a promise—a most unusual promise in that he believed that through ordeals which they would encounter, a great blessing would be theirs if they persevered. He says to his disciples, “In your patience possess ye your souls,” or “In your patience ye shall win your souls.”

Let us in the first place make an analysis of our text. Consider this text—*en te hupomone humon kteses the tas psychas humon*. “In the endurance of you, you will gain the souls of you.” This passage may be translated variously. *The New English Bible* translates, “By standing firm you will win true life for yourselves.” Moffatt translates, “Hold out steadfast and you win your souls.” RSV translates, “By your endurance you will gain your lives.” To be sure the key words in the text are *hupomone* (endurance) and *psychas* (souls or lives). Once we discover the true meaning of these two words we will be in a position to understand what our text really says. *Hupomone* does not mean patience but rather endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance—the capacity to endure and to triumph

in suffering. The word *psychas* means more than the conventional understanding of the English word soul. It means life, mental powers, "to realize one's own self" and as Rudolf Bultmann says, the word *psychas* means "the human state of being alive which inheres in man as a striving, willing, purposing self." <sup>2</sup>

What Jesus appears to be saying to his disciples is more than the exhortation to be "patient" under the pressures of persecution and peril. Jesus does not bid his disciples to possess their soul or lives in patience. He said something far more fundamental and striking than that. He said that it was by patience and endurance that we are to win or get possession of our lives. To translate correctly: "By your endurance you will win yourselves life." Man has the tendency to believe that his life or soul is given to him complete and not as something given to him to win. To be sure our souls are not given to us ready-made, finished and complete. They have to be made; our souls, our lives are prizes to be won. We do not start with them but rather we gradually get possession of them. It was Robert Browning who said, "Life is a stuff to try the soul's strength on and induce the man." The soul is not an inheritance into which we are born, it is something we make and fashion and win for ourselves out of the varied disciplines and experiences of life. We win our souls and our lives by the manner in which we handle the vicissitudes, difficulties, tensions, and raw experiences which life throws at us.

You see there is a very big difference between possessing a thing and making it entirely your own. I may possess a book. I may even own it, but the winning of its treasure is quite another thing. I may possess a musical instrument, even own it; but to win its secret melody is quite another thing. To win the soul is to bring all its rebel powers into willing homage to Jesus. To win the soul is to illicit all its talents, music and cause it to spring forth in constant praise. To win the soul is gradually to constrain all that is within us to praise and bless the name of Jesus. Yes, says Jesus, you will win your souls. What a glorious promise! What a magnificent challenge! This is precisely what the black preacher has accomplished in his history in this country. He embraced the Christian faith. He believed in Jesus Christ, the savior of men. He believed in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He longed for the day to come when men could live as free children of the Son of God and each man respected as a brother for whom Christ had died. But in order to do this, even to believe this, he had to endure and in his endurance, in his capacity to survive, to stand the persecution, to bring a message of hope to those who existed in despair he was able by the grace of God not only to win his own life but the lives of the members of the black witnessing community.



*Second, let us consider the promise which Jesus makes in this significant challenge embodied in our text.* We raise the question, What is meant by a man winning his own soul? To be sure we can understand winning others to the side of right, bringing others to a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, lifting others out of the clutches of sin and changing the direction of the lives of others. These are common occurrences and we understand them. But Jesus speaks of something far more profound. He speaks of a man winning his own soul as if man could be the maker of his own soul along with its creator. Now if we thoughtfully turn over this idea in our minds, we will soon discover that there is a deep meaning in this fact. For example, we ought to be reminded of the simple truth that no one comes into the world fully developed. Man is born with a great many potentialities. God creates nothing perfect, but everything for perfection. There is a sense to be sure in which a man wins his body. All we need to do is remember a helpless baby lying on its bed and we immediately think of what a long way it has to travel so that its body structure can grow and develop into the full strength of manhood. If that child restrained from all exercise of its powers it would be helpless all its life. It is only as this child exercises his power that power is gained and the more power to be exercised, the more power is gained until finally this body stands before us a fully developed man, the very image of physical perfection. He has won his physical perfection through endurance. It is only by the exercise of his physical powers that he gains additional physical powers. This is the law of life.

This truth is operative in the realm of the mind of man. The mind is given to us by God as a capacity which may be developed into perfection but it is far from being perfect when it is given. It is only as man uses his mind, exercises it, disciplines it, as he seeks to master the fields of knowledge which are thrust before him that he grows strong in his mental capacity and develops the potential which is given to the mind by God. Education depends not so much on putting knowledge into the child's mind as drawing forth power by the exercise of the mind. Thus it must be said in a true sense that a man may win his mind.

A man wins his body, a man wins his mind, and a man wins his soul or his life. Every time we choose the difficult right rather than the easy wrong we gain our lives. Every time we sacrifice ease and comfort to do service for our fellowman we gain our lives. Every time we say a kind word and do a loving deed we gain our lives. Our lives will grow and expand on loving-kindness and sacrifice.

The black preacher's soul also grew and developed. He exerted and lost himself in acts of service, of love and devotion to members of the black witnessing community, visiting those who were cast

into prison, bringing words of comfort to those who mourned. He won his soul through the sermons he preached, the hymns he sang, the scripture he read, and the prayers he prayed. He developed soul—the tenderness, the capacity to suffer with those who were afflicted. He developed his soul through his tears, his anguish, his agony as he fought to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to a disinherited and dispossessed people. And what a soul he developed! What an interpretation of the Christian faith emerged from that soul! He became in a real sense a spectacle—an object of concern to men and to angels and even to God. He developed a toughness and a tenderness. He developed compassion and courage, pity and power, faith and fortitude. He developed sight and insight which enabled him to discover the fundamental dynamics of human existence. The black preacher realized that the truth of Jesus, the truth presented in the text—this great promise had been fulfilled and incarnated in his own life. He knew that the winning of one's soul is a continuous process because the religious life is the fulfillment of one's own nature in its truest sense. It is the unfolding of one's truest self under the Fatherhood of God—the God who gives life, sustains and nourishes it. It is the divine within us responding to the divine in God reaching out and striving to measure itself in beauty beside his perfect life. It is a spiritual energy welling up from within and realizing itself in thoughts and deeds, in purity of heart and service to mankind.

This conception of the religious life as something which develops from within is true to the known laws of nature. Nothing in nature is superadded, that is put on from the outside. Everything in nature which grows is the result of the wonderful processes of fulfillment from within. Growth is a vital inward process as distinguished from mechanical process. Growth is a mystery which envelops the essence of life wherever it happens. Growth cannot be understood and it cannot be imitated. It has perennial interest and the wonder of the miraculous. As we study growth, the impression deepens within us that we are face to face with a method which not only transcends our understanding but from which our finest skills are differentiated in both degree and kind. Men have done wonderful things with thought, science, and technology. But the miraculous unfolding of a wild flower is still a mystery today as it was when the scientist began to look. Compare and discover both the thing that grows and the thing that is made and one discovers a gulf which has never been closed. Mechanism and technology are marvelous but growth is miraculous. Jesus is saying in our text that even though the disciples were confronted with persecution, trials, suffering, and imprisonment, when these things are rightly appropriated and used they may contribute to the growth of man.

The mystery of this growth is to be compared with the mystery of the process by which it takes place. Growth imperceptively unnoticed is like the planting of a seed in the soil in that a man knows not how it grows but ere long, because of the winds, the rain, the sunshine, the flower bursts the earth and there it is. How it came about is a mystery. It has grown unnoticed, silently, deliberately, and mysteriously. When it appears men wonder how it happened and what caused it to be. There may be no rational explanation for its presence but there it is. And it is there because God gave the increase—caused the growth.

The black preacher has grown in a similar way. No one really believed 300 years ago that he was even a human being. The Constitution said he was only three fifths of a man. He and his fellow parishioners were sold like cattle and counted as a commodity. His value was determined by his sheer physical strength. There were even those who believed he did not have a soul. Through the 300 years of persecution, travail, anguish, and agony, growth was silently taking place. He developed a language. He produced a literature. He created his own music and through his sermons he presented to the world his own interpretation of the Christian faith. The suffering which he experienced was appropriated and used in some mysterious way to develop his life. So the black preacher appears today on the American scene as God's own creation. White America looks at him and the other members of his race and wonders what has happened and how it came about. They ask, What were the forces which produced this new people of God, this new black prophet preacher and anointed one of God? No rational explanation can be given other than the one found in our text, which is none other than the promise of Jesus, "By standing firm you will win true life for yourselves."

*Third, let us consider how life develops through endurance.* Those of us who have not won our lives ought to be reminded of the keys or techniques which were used by the black preacher and the black witnessing community. Self-mastery is the first prerequisite of winning one's life or soul. We say that a man is self-possessed. What do we mean by that? We mean there resides in man a power which holds all his faculties at command and brings them into service in spite of all distraction. When a man does this he possesses himself. He has "his thing." He is "together." He can do what he will with that side of the self which he chooses to use. Nothing takes away his courage. Excitement and tumult do not take away the clearness of his vision. He keeps his eye on the theme. He has possession of his tongue. No confusion takes from him the power of lucid speech. The man has himself in hand. Self-mastery is one of the keys which the black preacher had to use. He had to have



self-control so as to know what to attack and when to attack. He had to demonstrate the courage to retreat when retreat was necessary and to advance when the situation warranted. He had to know when to shout and when to whisper, when to condemn and when to comfort, when to show pity and when to exercise power. The black preacher was a diplomat, psychologist, preacher, negotiator, and above all a man of God. He showed calmness and courage under extreme pressure. His judgment was balanced and his faith was grounded in God who is both the source of life and the conqueror of death. Self-mastery was one of the keys used by the black preacher as he possessed his soul.

The second key was self-surrender. The black preacher was aware of the fact that we never own ourselves till we have given up owning ourselves and yield ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ who gives us back to ourselves. Self-control is self-possession. We do not own ourselves as long as it is possible for any weakness in flesh, sense, or spirit to gain dominion over us and hinder us from doing what we know as right. The first thing to do is the thing which those men had already done to whom Jesus gave this promise that they would win their souls. What they had done, the first decisive step which they had taken in the work of finding their lives, was not to acquaint themselves with all knowledge or seek to understand the mysteries. They had not even lingered at the doors of the schools of the rabbis. But one day the man Jesus looked into their souls with the light of Divine Spirit in his eye and as they were mending their nets he commanded them to leave all there and follow him. They heard this command from the King of truth and the source of wisdom and knowledge and they left all and followed him.

Jesus warns his disciples that they will be delivered up to the religious authorities, brought before governors and kings, cast into prisons, and even put to death. These men are going to suffer and yet Jesus tells them that they will not be hurt. They are going to lose precious things and yet they are going to win something. They are about to die, yet they are going to live as they have never lived before. Faced with this situation Jesus does not offer exhortation or comfort but rather congratulations. He appears to be saying in the words of Walt Whitman, "I do not commiserate, I congratulate you."

Those who have faced great physical danger or who have been matched by fate against overwhelming odds of anxiety and trouble know what great things are done when men face the world, fate, life, death, and misfortune and say in their hearts, "We will win this fight or die." We know what happens when such a resolution is made. The iron will rises up and takes possession of the feeble

body. The doubting soul shakes off its hesitating weakness and is drawn back upon itself. It draws on its terrible latent powers and moves the individual through the vicissitudes of life triumphantly.

The words of Jesus speak to us about the rewards of such an endurance. They tell us how to face life, how to meet its rebuffs, its disappointments and they brace us for the hour of death. They assure us that if only we will bear up against the trials of life resolutely we will suffer no real loss but rather win our lives.

We must make up our minds to accept life as it is with its risks, tasks, bereavements, benedictions, as an opportunity for the making of a soul. If this world of ours were meant for joy and happiness alone, it is a failure. If this world were meant for smug well-being, it is foolishness. The world is a place in which by struggle we can grow strong and by fighting evil we can win the good. There is no peace of mind until we take the hard condition of life as a discipline meant to harden what is soft within us and to soften what is hard.

The endurance which is the fruit of acceptance of the discipline of life may be of many kinds and its rewards differ with its character. There is the endurance of the Romans who did not bow before the barbarians; of the Spartans who counted death better than disgrace; of the Greek philosophers who counted knowledge as more precious than wealth. There is, however, an endurance which is greater than any of these—the endurance revealed in the life and character of the black preacher and the black American. This is the kind of endurance which was first revealed to the world by Jesus Christ, who endured the cross. It is the endurance which springs out of a great love, the love of a person and the love of a cause. It was an endurance of such a character that Jesus had in mind when he said, "By your endurance, you will win your soul." This endurance sprang from a great love for himself and the truth for which he stood. It was this kind of endurance that enabled the early Christian community to survive. One pagan historian wrote, "These imbeciles are persuaded that they are absolutely immortal and that they will live forever." The martyr Ignatius wrote, "Near the sword, the nearer to God; in company with the wild beast, in company with God. When I come to the arena, then shall I become a man."

The black preacher and the black American through endurance, with faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, have won their souls! They are a spectacle to the world and to men. Men ask, How did this come about? What is the source of their strength? The existence of the black preacher and the black American is due to the creative workings of the grace of God. We are what we are by the grace of God—God's strong, unbreakable, and amazing grace.

In the endurance of you, you will gain the souls of you. What is

the meaning of the word soul within the context of the black Christian experience? Soul is the *strength* to survive in a hostile environment; to break through the legal and social conventions which tend to dehumanize and degrade. Soul is the *ability* to use creatively the destructive powers of a racist American society for the development of a tough faith and undying hope and unconquerable love. Soul is *power* that has its source in oneself and God; a power which gives one strength to survive a thousand Calvaries and to rise out of the social and ideological graves into which one has been cast. Soul is *life*—an abundant life; a life that is able to weave its fabric of diverse threads of human existence into some meaningful and harmonious pattern. Soul is *love*—a strong, rugged, and victorious love; a love that can endure the thousand and one shocks that life is heir to; a love as strong as steel and yet as gentle as a mother's touch. Soul is *victory*—a victory born in the bosom of defeat, yet triumphant in and through it; a victory which overcomes and outlasts the world; a victory that triumphs over death, hell, and the grave. Soul is *freedom*—freedom to express oneself restrained only by God's purpose and Christ's love. It is the freedom to be "me," to accept oneself as a distinctive and unique part of God's creation. It is the freedom to live in union with Christ, to grow in his likeness, to be rooted and grounded in his love, and to mature in his fellowship.

Soul is strength, ability, power, life, love, victory, freedom—the essential ingredients of the black man's life without which he would have been crushed and annihilated. Possibly the poet expressed the true meaning of soul when he wrote "Black Soul of the Land."

I saw an old black man walk down the road,  
a Georgia country road . . .  
His face was leathered, lean, and strong,  
gashed with struggle scars . . .  
there stood a secret manhood tough and tall  
that circumstance and crackers could not kill:  
a secret pine unbent within a spine,  
a secret source of steel,  
a secret sturdy rugged love,  
a secret crouching hate,  
a secret knife within his hand,  
a secret bullet in his eye.

Give me your spine, old man, old man,  
give me your rugged hate,  
give me your sturdy oak-tree love,  
give me your source of steel.<sup>3</sup>



## CONFLICT, CHALLENGE, DEFEAT, VICTORY

For the wind was against them . . . . But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear . . . . "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

—Matthew 14:24-31

There are four movements or experiences in this story about the disciples of Jesus—the inevitability of conflict, the challenge to do the impossible, the experience of defeat and victory through Jesus, the Liberator. There is in our text conflict, challenge, defeat, and victory!

Let us consider what this story says to us about these four experiences which run the gamut of the lives of men. We must examine the conflict, the challenge, the defeat, and the victory in this story so as to ascertain what these experiences of Jesus' disciples say to us about the nature of Christian existence and the meaning of the Christian life.

*Let us consider this element of conflict in this story; the one inescapable element in the lives of all men.* Matthew 14:22 declares that Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat," and when it was "distant from the land" the boat was "beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them (14:24)" or "the wind was in their face," knocking the breath out of them. These were contrary winds, or as *The New English Bible* translates, "battling with a head wind, and a rough sea."

Contrary winds! This is one of the mysteries which besets life behind and before and no mystery is more baffling than this one. We live in a world in which it appears that the whole complex of hostile forces seems to form a ruthless and reckless conspiracy against human life. There are times when the fundamental forces of life



seem to be against men. We are forced to carry on our existence in a shroud of darkness. We are thrown into seas which are bent on burying us and the contrary winds beat on all sides of our shabby and sometimes broken boats. We are frightened and baffled. No life escapes these contrary winds. We must remember that this boat was filled with disciples, men who were committed to Jesus, the Liberator. But discipleship and commitment to Jesus did not exempt them from the experience of contrary winds—this ruthless force which nullified their exertions and rendered all their efforts futile. It matters not what you are—saint or sinner—every life must have its contrary winds! Life is a tempestuous affair and the contrary winds take many forms—chronic ill health, poorly rewarded labor, frustrated ambitions, and ruthless oppression.

Contrary winds! If we would remember that fact about life many of our cold and cruel judgments would remain unspoken. Here is a man gifted by nature with mental and physical endowments and even though his achievements are normal they are out of proportion to his abilities. Often we seek to account for his failures as due to some hidden vices, laziness, or lack of initiative. We forget the unfavorable conditions in which people live and the paralyzing influences which are encountered. We ignore the contrary winds which many are required to plough their way through: We must not and should not pronounce a final verdict until we have taken into consideration and measured the force of the contrary winds through which a man or a people have ploughed.

Black Americans looking back over their own history know how much of it was little less than roaring against contrary winds. Margaret Walker senses the struggle when she writes:

Out of this blackness we must  
struggle forth;  
from want of bread, of pride,  
of dignity.  
Struggle between the morning and  
the night.  
This marks our years; this settles,  
too, our plight.<sup>1</sup>

William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs describe vividly the inner feelings of black Americans when they encounter the contrary winds of racism, oppression, and brutality. They challenge us to:

Slip for a moment into the soul of a black girl whose womanhood is blighted, not because she is ugly, but because she is black and by definition all blacks are ugly.

Become for a moment a black citizen of Birmingham, Alabama, and try to understand his grief and dismay when in-

nocent children are slain while they worship, for no other reason than that they are black.

Imagine how an impoverished mother feels as she watches the light of creativity snuffed out in her children by schools which dull the mind and environs which rot the soul.

For a moment make yourself the black father whose son went innocently to war and there was slain—for whom, for what?

For a moment be any black person, anywhere, and you will feel the waves of hopelessness that engulfed black men and women when Martin Luther King was murdered. All black people understood the tide of anarchy that followed his death.<sup>2</sup>

These experiences of contrary winds have been expressed in the black spirituals: "Deep River," "Dere's No Hidin' Place Down Dere," and "Nobody Knows De Trouble I See." Consider the thought about contrary winds presented in one of these spirituals:

Nobody knows de trouble I see,  
Nobody knows but Jesus  
Nobody knows de trouble I see,  
Glory hallelujah.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, life brings forth struggle and success, defeat and victory, pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, sickness and health, death and life. But it remains essentially a struggle rather than an achievement and if we make good, achieve the victory, it is because we have mastered the contrary winds. Still the questions haunt us: Was all this struggle necessary? Must life be forever a wind-buffed boat making headway against a stormy gale? Such questions are rooted in a valid conviction that life, as God meant it to be, is not a brutal struggle for mere existence but a positive, joyous, triumphant achievement in spite of the contrary winds.

Contrary winds, trouble—but glory hallelujah! This is the eternal miracle—the transmutation of life from conflict to harmony, from storm to calm. The Christian knows that life is not a sea at the mercy of contrary winds. It is neither the contrary wind nor the small, poorly constructed boat, but rather the man in the boat that counts. It is not the mountain of circumstance but the faith of the soul that survives. It is neither heredity or environment, contrary winds or rough seas, but Jesus, the Liberator who is both our Lord and Savior, that determines one's destiny. What we want to know is what kind of man is in the boat, whether Jesus, the Liberator is there beside him, around him, and within him for the winds depend on the man and not the man on the winds.

*The challenge to do the impossible emerges out of a cluster of irreconcilable and contradictory experiences of the disciples of Jesus.* There are the terrified and frightened disciples who when they saw Jesus thought he was a spirit or ghost; the comforting words of Jesus, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear"; the challenge of Peter to Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water," and the challenge of Jesus to Peter, "Come."

When the disciples saw Jesus approaching them on the lighting-illuminated waters, they fell into a state of panic and fear. They were terrified, greatly alarmed, and shrieked with fear. The extraordinary thing here is that the disciples of Jesus were terrified and troubled by the coming of Jesus, the Liberator. Only a few moments before they wished for him, prayed for his presence, and cried to him for deliverance. When he came to them, instead of welcoming him they shrieked with fear. They supposed that Jesus was a ghost, spirit, apparition, or phantom. They cried out with fear because they failed to recognize him and because they did not know him. They misunderstood who he was, were troubled by his presence, and were afraid of him!

These disciples are not alone in this experience of being afraid of Jesus, of being troubled by his presence. One of the reasons that many people reject Jesus today and will have nothing to do with him is due to the simple fact that they do not get a full and true view of who Jesus really is, of what he means and what he does. They see him through the distorting media of racism, prejudice, erroneous representations. Jesus is rejected because he is misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misrepresented. When one thinks of what Jesus could mean to men and considers all that he has done for them, one would expect humanity to bow down at his feet and cry "My Lord, Savior, and Liberator." The Christian faith is based on the assumption that man will and must love the highest, the best, and the noblest when he sees it. Jesus believed that in spite of the strong passions and appetites of the heart that draw men to sin, the drawing power of his personality would prove stronger. If it is true that men must and will love the highest when they see it, and that Jesus will draw when he is lifted up, how do we account for the fact that many have not been drawn to him, that they reject, ignore, and deny him? The answer is that men have not been drawn to Jesus because the real Jesus, the man of God's own choosing, has not been lifted up before their eyes. They have looked at Jesus only through distorted minds, through the eyeglasses of prejudices, through the medium of false representations.

Possibly the picture of Jesus which is most distorted is the one presented to the world by many of the so-called Christian believers. People have a right to expect that they take the ideas of Jesus

Christ from the people who call themselves Christians. The Christian is supposed to be a living witness and a living likeness of Jesus, the Liberator. He is supposed to be a photograph of the mind and heart of God which has been revealed to the world through the life of the liberating Son of God. What kind of photograph of Jesus can a narrow, ruthless, and prejudiced believer present to the world? What kind of photograph of Jesus Christ can the so-called "Christian" racist who doesn't believe or practice the brotherhood of man or the Fatherhood of God present to the world? To be sure, one of the greatest hindrances to the progress of the Christian mission and movement is found in the conduct of those persons who confess to be Christians but present to the world a distorted picture of Jesus Christ through the false and corrupted medium of daily events which make up their own lives.

Many people today have only seen Jesus through the distorted, confused, and irrelevant medium of the historic creeds of the church. Let no one say that we are attempting to discredit the historic creeds of the church. It is inevitable that men should attempt to give precise and logical expressions to the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. Yet it is true that the creeds do give a distorted picture of Jesus. For example, listen to what the Nicene Creed says about Jesus, the Liberator: "We believe in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity: God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God: begotten, not made, one in being with the Father."

This irrelevant Jesus of the Nicene Creed is embalmed in categories of Greek philosophy and becomes a ghost from some distant world who frightens and terrorizes men. When modern man who is hardened by the problems of racism, war, poverty, and environmental contamination encounters the Jesus of the Nicene Creed, he is baffled, mystified, and confused. This Jesus of the creed turns him off. The Jesus of the creed is not sufficient for men who must live in this concrete technological jungle of our modern world. The Jesus Christ of the creed is a ghost, an apparition, a phantom. He is powerless to deal with the contingencies of history and the nonmanipulatable and inescapable aspects of human existence.

Again, there are those who see Jesus Christ only through the spectacles of the theologian and biblical scholar who, in many instances, presents a picture of Jesus Christ so distorted that it is absolutely false. Every so-called "life of Jesus" presented by biblical scholars must be read with caution and care. This is due to the fact that biblical scholars consciously or unconsciously impose on their presentation of Jesus a set of assumptions, criteria, and value judgments which are absolutely irrelevant. Those who read Jesus Christ according to Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, Vin-

cent Taylor, Gunther Boarkamm, T. W. Manson, and Wolfhart Pannenberg should not forget the great originals! Read the Jesus Christ of the scholars! Well and good! But in the name of God study the originals: Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and discover the difference. Praise God! Modern biblical scholarship is bent on making the gospel of Jesus Christ—his word, work, message, and mission—"relevant" to the modern world. But in the originals this Jesus with his word and work confronts the world and men with the relentless and inescapable concerns of a God who loves, is righteous and just! The Jesus of the Gospels addresses himself to the vital issues of human existence—hunger, hate, prejudice, exploitation, and conflict and his work is designed to lift these from the hearts and minds of men. The Jesus of the Gospels sees the needs of people, he ministers to them, he touches and heals them. Those who are buried in the tombs of the world and hear his voice come forth free, emancipated, and liberated.

The ghostly Christ of the creeds and the theologians' Christ cause fear and terror, but the Jesus of our text speaks his word across the troubled waters of the sea: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." He brings peace and calm to the baffled, troubled souls of his disciples caught in the midst of the storm.

The voice of Jesus brings calm and courage to Peter and he lays down a challenge to the Liberator: "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water."

Let no one think that Peter in his challenge to Jesus is presumptuous and that Jesus Christ permits him to sink in order to teach this foolish and reckless disciple a lesson in humility. When Jesus commanded Peter to come, he put his heart, soul, and mind behind that invitation and nothing disappointed him more than Peter's failure to come all the way.

Jesus, the Liberator answers the challenge of Peter with a challenge, "Come." There is something here which grips our hearts in this amazing story of Jesus riding the storm. This power story fascinates us because it is an exhibition of power, the power of Jesus over the forces of nature. When Peter asked permission to come to Jesus on the waters he was expressing a desire for fellowship with Jesus, to participate in a power which was beyond his human weaknesses. Peter takes the words out of the mouth of Jesus and hurls them back with a challenge. Peter says, "If you really want me to 'take heart' and to be of 'good courage,' let me be hearty and courageous indeed! Let me prove how hearty and courageous I am. Let me participate and share your power by walking on these troubled waters. Let me climb to your heights and prove myself superior to the forces which filled my heart with terror and anguish just a few moments ago." Jesus had revealed himself in a new dimension: the



dimension of power over the forces of nature. It was an hour when Jesus broke upon the spiritual consciousness of Peter in new glory. Peter desired to share Jesus' mastery over the forces that threatened to engulf his life. Peter wanted to do exactly what he saw Jesus doing. This feeling persists even for us in that this is an acted parable of power which a Christ-filled life should possess.

The challenge of Peter is met by the challenge of Jesus, "Come." The heart of Jesus is thrilled by the man who is prepared to take great risks for him and in his name. He demands of his followers that they give all of themselves to him, to love God with all their heart, mind, and strength. In the eyes of Jesus the great men and women are those who have flung everything onto the scales on his side—the widow who gave everything out of her poverty, the merchant who sold all that he had in order to make the supreme purchase, and Peter who leaves his friends in the security of the boat and takes the risk of coming to Jesus, the Liberator on the waters. This is faith in its most profound meaning. It is faith which involves seeing and following, intuition and courage. Peter believed that Jesus Christ was out there on the waters beyond him, out there on the crest of those rough waters, waiting to welcome him. He was sure that he had heard his Liberator's voice and certain that he had seen his form. He takes the leap into the dark, knowing that in that darkness he will find the Light of the world. We must remember that faith is the faculty by which we tap the unlimited resources of God. The limits of faith are set not by our own strength but by our willingness to appropriate the inexhaustible power of God.

Jesus appears to be saying to Peter, "If you want to participate in my power you do not have to sing, march, beg, demonstrate, or even pray. Be obedient to my command, live under my authority, be committed to me, and share in my ministry of liberation and you will be empowered to walk on the turbulent waters of the sea." The answer of Jesus to Peter's challenge "Come," came across the storm-tossed waters. That was admission of the possibility of the impossible! "Come," says Jesus! The impossible is possible in that mood of the soul, in that attitude of the heart, in that consent of the will. "Come," says Jesus, "and discover and experience my power but also discover a weakness in yourself of which you are unaware." "Come," says Jesus, "and discover the weakness that lurks within your own heart that I may bring to you a new realization of my power, that in fellowship with me you may fulfill the high aspiration of your soul which asks to do the impossible."

Peter asked for permission, waited for orders, and having received the invitation of Jesus, obeyed and actually walked on the waters just as the Liberator was walking. Without hesitation Peter yielded his will to the will of Jesus and placed the frail, feeble foot

of his humanity on the waves and he did not sink! He was upheld! He did the impossible thing under the authority of Jesus, the Liberator. Between the frail man Peter and the power-filled Jesus a union was established so that as Peter touched the waves he did not sink. He walked on the waters and came to Jesus. That was a great moment and nothing that followed could undo that experience. To be sure, within a few moments the threatening waves would engulf him, but by and through the power of Jesus he had walked on the waters. The victory over circumstances, the conquest of the world and all of its demonic forces, the independence of all securities except the security of Jesus, the Liberator are given only to those who, like Peter, venture all for Jesus and count the world lost for the sake of Jesus, the Liberator.

*Conflict! Challenge! Let us move on to the third element in our message—defeat!*

This part of our message is best known and we need not tarry with it, but we must not omit it. There are three things I ask you to note: first, the reason for the defeat. Peter for a moment took his eyes off Jesus and "saw the wind." He became conscious of the fierceness of the wind and the anger of the waves. When he removed his eyes from Jesus he felt the power of the winds and the waves. Second, Peter was afraid. He lost courage! He panicked! Fear took the place of faith. Where faith reigns, fear has no place or power. Where fear reigns, faith is driven forth. In the precise moment when Peter surrendered to the assaults of the senses, took his eyes off Jesus, looked at the waves and became conscious of the winds, fear dispossessed faith and powerlessness followed. This was the moment of truth for Peter because he became aware of the actuality and the limitation of his humanity and his inability to walk in the difficult place without the supporting power of Jesus.

The sight of the winds, the paralysis of fear, is followed by the sinking. Peter found the waves too weak to hold him, yet strong enough to drown him. This was a sad experience, but thank God it is not the final one. The sinking is not the inevitable sequence of the walking. The sinking is the outcome of failure to keep in close contact with Jesus. The sinking results from the assaults of the senses by the winds and the waves so that fear takes the place of faith, paralysis the place of power, and Peter is back again on the ordinary and powerless level of human existence.

Peter was defeated! Peter had failed! Even in the bosom of defeat there is the possibility of victory. It was Edwin Markham who wrote:

Defeat may serve as well as victory  
To shake the soul and let the glory out.  
When the great oak is straining in the wind,

The boughs drink in new beauty, and the  
trunk  
Sends down a deeper root on the windward  
side.  
Only the soul that knows the mighty grief  
Can know the mighty rapture. Sorrows come  
To stretch our spaces in the heart for joy.<sup>4</sup>

It could be that this failure, defeat, was a necessary step to victory. Maybe it is only when we are defeated and helpless that we become usable and remakable by God. God does not seem to be able to do much with success and the lesson which is written large in his parables and teachings is that his bad men almost always perish, not by failing but by succeeding! A success is finished! But a failure, a defeat, that is different. No one can tell what will happen when a defeat is placed in the hands of Jesus, the Liberator and this is precisely what Peter did with his defeat. He turned it over to Jesus!

*Conflict! Challenge! Defeat! But thanks be to God who gives us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* "Lord, save me," cried the sinking Peter with the waters swirling and engulfing him. The mood of Peter's soul is different now when compared with the challenge he hurled at Jesus with the words, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." The mood of the soul of high vision, holy ecstasy, and a new aspiration for power disappears. The mood of Peter's soul now is one of defeat, fear, hopelessness, and helplessness. The strong and relentless waves, the powerful and roaring winds are too much for him and he cries out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" "Master, save me!" Out of the depth and sense of helplessness, in the agony of conscious weakness and defeat he makes another appeal to Jesus. It is no longer a request that he might be permitted to make some high adventure. He does not hurl a challenge at Jesus. He does not make a request to be permitted to do anything. Rather he makes a plea, helpless, direct, urgent, and agonizing to Jesus, the Master of wind and waves to do everything! Peter, in his hour of sinking, when the waves were engulfing him, saw Jesus still superior to wind and waves. With that vision of the victorious Jesus and the awareness of his own failing, a new kind of faith expresses itself in the cry of Peter, "Lord, save me!"

What followed? "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him!" Jesus took hold of him! Jesus caught hold of him! Jesus extends to Peter the hand of power! And what power has come forth from those hands! Power to heal the sick, to open blinded eyes, to feed the hungry, to raise the dead, to embrace little children, to care for the sick, and to lift men to their feet! The hand of power was followed by the word of love—the probing,

searching, revealing, and saving love of Jesus. "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" Little faith is one word in Greek which really means small faith. Possibly Moffatt expresses the central idea when he translates, "How little you trust me?" Jesus revealed the secret of failure when he asked Peter, "Why did you falter?" or "Why did you duplicate?" or "Why did you think twice?" Not that you say! Yes, just that. But you reply, "Is it not wise to think twice?" It depends on what the first thought was!

Little faith is a beautiful, gentle, but rebuking word. Peter was "little faith" now because he thought twice. He questioned one of his great decisions to be like Jesus and to do what Jesus was doing. He paused to question the resolution formed in a high mood of the soul. The hand of power, the word of love, the rebuking word. How little you trust me! Please note that Jesus did not give the rebuking word until he had saved Peter. He did not bend over Peter in the waters and say to him, "You see what you have done for yourself; if you will confess it, I will help you out." No, thank God! First the outstretched hand, and the mighty hand of Jesus lifted him. Then, when Jesus had placed him back on the waves he looked at Peter, and with a smile of tenderness and concern and that tone of Jesus which no one can match, he said, "What made you lose your nerve like that?"

*Conflict! Challenge! Defeat! Victory!* Peter walked the water again. Where did Jesus take him? Back to the boat, to the everyday.

High hours are given to us and they all have their value. If we answer their call in the strength of Jesus we will have marvelous experiences of power to do impossible things. Jesus takes us back to the boat. We must cross the sea in the ordinary way but something additional happened that day. Jesus went with Peter into the boat. Jesus, the Liberator is not only the Lord and Savior who enables others to do impossible things. He is also the Lord and Liberator who can walk the sea of life from shore to shore. He is with his people enabling them to continue his ministry of love and service in their world. When the people of God are faced with the strong and contrary winds of the world the Liberator speaks:

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,  
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid:  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee  
to stand,  
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.  
When through the deep waters I call thee to  
go,  
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.<sup>5</sup>

### 3

## THE TRIUMPHANT ADEQUACY OF JESUS

As they were coming down the mountain . . . they saw a great crowd about them . . . . Bring him to me. . . . I believe; help my unbelief!

—Mark 9:9, 14, 19, 24

Karl Ludwig Schmidt<sup>1</sup> and Johannes Weiss<sup>2</sup> agree that Mark 9:14-26 is founded on a good tradition, and that the unusual wealth of detail makes this miracle story distinctive even in Mark. These two scholars think that this miracle story is historically related to Jesus' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration in thought and time sequence, and that both are grounded on vivid recollections of what happened on the mount and in the valley.

Rudolf Bultmann contends that Mark 9:14-29 is a combination of two separate miracle stories in 14-20 and 21-27.<sup>3</sup> The disciples occupy the leading role in 14-19 and the father is the principal character in 21-27 and a secondary one in 17-19. The sickness is described twice—in verses 18 and 21—and the people who are already present in verse 14 are depicted as coming forward in verse 25, apparently for the first time. A "dumb spirit" is mentioned in verse 17, and an "unclean spirit" who is both dumb and deaf is spoken of in verse 25. Vincent Taylor, while recognizing the textual and historical basis for the ideas of the form critics, advances the hypothesis that the two narratives connected with the demon-possessed lad have been combined. The inability of the disciples to effect a cure is the main interest of verses 14-19, 28f., and the miracle story proper is presented in verses 20-27, which has lost its original conclusion.

For purposes of exposition we have, with the ideas suggested above, divided Mark 9:14-26 into three sections: (1) the ineffective disciples, 14-18; (2) the reproach of Jesus, 19-22; (3) "I believe; help my unbelief . . . ," 23-26.

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" And one of the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for

he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able (Mark 9:14-18)."

"They were coming down the mountain." The best commentary on the descent of Jesus and his disciples is Raphael's canvas, on which he presents the vision on the mountain and the needs of the valley as one picture. The upper half of Raphael's "Transfiguration" shows the glorification of Christ before the awestruck eyes of his disciples and the lower half, a distraught father bringing his demon-possessed son to the disciples of Jesus. Above, the beauty of that high vision; below, tragic need, misery and suffering, the powerless disciples, and the fruitless discussion about the stark and naked needs of the valley. Here is life's true rhythm and alternation, the going up and the coming down, the vision and the challenge, the mount of prayer and the daily duties, the place of spiritual privilege and the place of suffering and confusion. The Mount of Transfiguration and the pain-filled valley are shown on one picture. The vision fades and does not return unless the power and insight there gained is used for God's sake in services of love. The tragic life is one which has had the high hour of vision and revelation and has not made any vital connection with the needs of the valley.

We live in a world where men and women have invested a tremendous amount of energy, effort, mind and spirit, brain and talent in mastering the fine art of going uphill, climbing to some height of advantage, position, power, or wealth, and pay no attention to this much finer art—the art of going downhill, to the place of need. Raphael painted this on canvas. Sidney Lanier sang it: "Downward the voices of Duty call/Downward to toil and be mixed with the main . . ." Jesus lived it. From the mount of prayer and vision Jesus descended ----- Praise God!

"They saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them." The mount of prayer and vision touches the valley of need and despair—a valley with its twisted and demented forms, its straw men, the empty men, the hollow men—a valley rent with many voices; voices crying out for help and deliverance, voices of accusations of reproach and fear. The situation which occasioned this "discussing" is presented by Mark. One from the crowd spoke to Jesus in answer to his question, "What are you discussing?" with the reply, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." The disciples were able to discuss, but unable to produce. They were able to argue, but unable to bring health and healing. In the presence of a deep and agoniz-



ing need all they could do was argue and discuss. The desperate condition of the demon-possessed lad called for more than arguments. They could not talk their way out of this one. This situation called for more than talk, more than arguments, debates, rebuttals, speeches, and resolutions and words. It called for and required adequate healing and restoring power.

Let us face it. How often in these days and times we later disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians, have been brought face to face with some appalling human need and all we did was discuss! Faced with the problem of hunger, even in this land of plenty, the good old USA, what do we do? We either deny that hunger exists as those two "Christian senators" from Mississippi did, or we call a Conference on Poverty and discuss! Face to face with the problem of racism, what has the church done? They have either joined in with the chorus, "Law and Order," or they have appointed a Commission on Race and Religion and discussed! When confronted with the problems of the ghettos in our cities, those human time bombs in the heart of America, the church has either withdrawn itself to more respectable sections of the cities, or they have accused those who have been trapped as being lazy, shiftless, and worthless persons who ought to pull themselves up by their own boot straps, or they have created a commission to study and discuss!

The depth of the sickness of those who are racists—black and white—who are victims of greed, lust, and self-centeredness, who are creators of poverty and the exploiters who make up the establishment of our cities is described vividly by Mark. This sickness is no surface matter. Something is fundamentally wrong and amiss deep in the center of man's being. Look how perfectly the seizures of the epileptic lad fits the evil spirit of the racists—black and white. It seizes the racists—black and white; it dashes them down into devastation and slaughter. The racists foam at the mouth and grind their teeth in emotion reaching hysteria, in hatred and anger; they become rigid in death.

This suffering world has asked Christ's disciples, the Christian church to, "cast it out, and they were not able." Many times we did not try; other times we have joined in with the foaming and the grinding; often we have not had the courage. I press the question. What shall we say to that growing multitude of distraught men and women, troubled in body, mind, and spirit, the unstabiles, the casualties of our sex-ridden, tense, profit-driven world?

The sickness and ills of humanity have been brought to the church from the first to the twentieth century—to the disciples of him who said, "Fear not," and "My peace I give unto you,"—to his disciples and church who have been given "authority over unclean spirit," and "power to cast out demons." But repeatedly the story

works itself out to the same end—men and women who should not be, but are, powerless to make available the resources of Jesus for the healing of the mind, heart, and soul of men.

And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him (19-22a)."

"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you . . . . Bring him to me . . ." Jesus comes from his mount of prayer and vision into the world of the crowd. He comes—the Lord of life—into the world of man. He comes to be with his disciples in their hopelessness and helplessness. He comes to the crowd to meet their desperate need and he brings with him a power and confidence that enables men to open their lives to him and unburden before him the whole sorry tale of their distresses and anxieties. He enters the world of unbelief with a reproach and healing—"A whole world of disbelief stands in the way of the boy's restoration." Now, why are the disciples helpless, powerless, anemic, weak, and impotent? Jesus answers—the lack of faith! He looks at the disciples and the crowd, lumps them together and cries, "O faithless generation!"

Let's confess it this morning. We do not really believe in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ as the only sure foundation of the world's survival and welfare. We really do not believe that Jesus has given to us the only permanent cure, when carried into action, of the world's sickness. One would think that after the carnivals of slaughter, the orgies of devastation, the mounting increase of crime, the assassinations, the looting and burning of the past ten years that men would eagerly embrace the person and teachings of Jesus as an easy starting point for world redemption. But we have not! And why? We do not believe. We are bluffed by the loud voices of the world's bullies. They shout at us, "You don't mean to tell me that you would be so stupid and naïve and sentimental as to suggest that Jesus and his teachings can and will work in this rough and tough world of international politics?" They shout to us again: "You don't really believe that Jesus Christ is the truth and the life, that he is really the revelation of the will of God for men, and that in his life and teachings one will find the solution to the problems of racism, poverty, the ghetto, and war?" We answer in a whisper, "Oh no, of course not; we are reasonable men!" Which, being interpreted, means, "We are faithless men." To this faithless church Jesus cries, "Bring him to me."

"But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, "He is dead (Mark 9:22b-26)."

"And he [the father] said, . . . "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." "If you can do anything . . ." "*ei ti dune boetheson hemin.*" Help us . . . come to our aid. Vincent Taylor notes: "The father's words leave a very vivid impression; his doubt about the healer's power, his appeal for compassion and help, his identification of himself, and perhaps his family also, with the lad, shown in his use of the plural."<sup>4</sup> Swete contends that, "the father's faith had been broken by the failure of the disciples," and, "that in the struggle to believe the father had no experience to assist him."<sup>5</sup> So he cries to Jesus, which is more a challenge than a cry, "Have compassion on us"—*splagchnistheis eph'hemas.*

Here the father challenges Jesus not only to be affected in his heart by the misery, suffering, and disease of the world in which he lived, but also to enter that world of misery and take upon himself that misery, and in the midst of it, speak his word of healing and grace. The power of the demons must be met by the power of Jesus, and in this conflict the father urges Jesus to have the last word!

Let us look again at the question of the father: "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." With this question the father is raising a fundamental question about the nature of reality. The question expresses the fear that demonism and despair may have the last word in our life here on earth. Epilepsy was reckoned demonic and the boy in the story was an epileptic. "If you can do anything?" There was genuine doubt. Maybe the old scheme of things is demonic. Maybe life was designed to be twisted, frustrated, "full of sound and fury signifying nothing." Maybe life is a "tale told by an idiot." When you think of what a twisted-minded paperhanger can do to a whole nation and the irrationality of human existence as it is dramatized in the behavior of men, when the Socrateses are made to drink the hemlock, and when the Saviors are crucified, and the Pauls are beheaded and the Latimers are burned at the stake—can you make sense of this? This father of the lad is saying maybe demonism has the last word.

This demonic force in human existence has been the subject of

philosophers and theologians in the past and the present. For example, Edwin Lewis says:

Contradiction inheres in the structural framework of existence; it inheres in the nature of man. *Creation* is creativity in strife and discreativity.<sup>6</sup>

Creative joy is tempered to creative agony. Creation is a song which is also a cry. . . . The fitting symbol of creativity in conflict with discreativity, of the divine in conflict with the demonic, more concretely of the Creator in conflict with the Adversary, is a Cross and a Crown of Thorns, and not otherwise can there be that Resurrection which is the Creator's final triumph.<sup>7</sup>

Karl Barth calls this irrational element of existence *Nichtige*—which may be translated “nothingness”—“the nothing” which has been nullified and annulled; the chaos, sin, the devil, and the demons.<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich describes the demonic as powers which are opposed to the manifestation of the new reality made possible by and through “the Christ.” He writes:

New reality presupposes an old reality; and this old reality, according to prophetic and apocalyptic descriptions, is the state of estrangement of man and his world from God. This estranged world is ruled by structures of evil, symbolized as demonic powers. They rule individual souls, nations, and even nature. They produce anxiety in all its forms. It is the task of the Messiah to conquer them and to establish a new reality from which the demonic powers or the structures of destruction are excluded.<sup>9</sup>

Tillich's description of the presence of the demonic element which pervades man's total experience is worthy of serious consideration. He writes:

It is not an exaggeration to say that today man experiences his present situation in terms of disruption, conflict, self-destruction, meaninglessness and despair in all realms of life. . . . [This] has given theology a new understanding of the demonic tragic structures of individual and social life. . . . It is a question of reality in which the self-estrangement of our existence is overcome, a reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning and hope.<sup>10</sup>

E. S. Brightman contends that any impartial and thoughtful evaluation of life would lead one to the conclusion that absolute goodness is not in control. He writes:

When man faces his experience thoughtfully, the first impression life makes on him is certainly not that of the om-

nipotence and absoluteness of good. Man's world looks much more like a battlefield than a triumphal entry, more like a problem than a solution. The religious man sees the evil facts.<sup>11</sup>

Brightman also observes that those who believed in a finite God [and he believed in one], "admit that goodness is not in perfect control of the universe, on account of the presence of natural evils either as uncreated factors within God's eternal experience or as some eternal being (matter or devil), external to God."<sup>12</sup>

"And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.'" Commentators have interpreted these words in two different senses. They may be taken as an exclamation of wonder that anyone should use the word if in connection with God's power. The man was just speaking on a hypothesis—"In case you are able to do anything." That is no way—as Jesus' repetition of the "if you can" might indicate—to approach a question of God's power.

Others take the words as referring to the man's own part in the healing. "If *you* can," Jesus may be saying, throwing the issue back to the man himself: "It is not a question of 'if I can.' It is a matter determined by *your* faith." This is in line with his frequent declaration, "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

Taken either way the words proclaim the same great truth of the power of God and the need of faith to make that power operative. The statement which follows immediately, "All things are possible to him who believes," must of course be taken in the light of Jesus' teaching and life. If they are taken in sodden, unspiritual literalism, they become immoral nonsense. They offer the believer no justification for acting as if he possessed a private magic. Yet in the wide realm of the kingdom of God, and of God's continued action to bring in that kingdom, whether for one human life or for the world, there is no barrier that can be set against the divine invasion: none but our own cardinal weakness—that often we believe more firmly in the power of the demons of evil than in the power of the God of love.

"The father of the child cried out . . .," "I believe; help my unbelief!" These words too can have different meanings. They can mean "Change my unbelief into belief," "Help my want of faith," "Help me where faith falls short." The phrase, "help my unbelief," is a cry for aid to a faith in the pains of birth. "Help my faith where it is ready to fail." Here we are confronted with a half-faith encompassed with doubts and fear which needs power to bring it to life. Or they can mean "Help me in spite of my inadequate faith." The difference is not as great as might appear at first sight. When one receives God's help in spite of the lingering unbelief, that experience will, to some degree at least, change unbelief into belief.

The father confronted with this enigma of life experiencing the pulls of faith and doubts cries out to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief." This is a prayer that should rise daily from our hearts and lives. No one ever passes beyond the need of it because we are strange mixtures of belief and unbelief, of faith and doubt. The father cried out to Jesus as we have cried to him when life has choked us as it did when John F. Kennedy was assassinated and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. We were all driven to the extremity of things, and we cried as the father cried to God, "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief."

What is really the problem of this father in our study this morning? The father wanted to believe that there was an option to violence; that demonism, the grinding, the foaming at the mouth, and the seizures, were not the last word for man's existence on earth. He wanted to believe that violence was not the only choice. He is asking Jesus this question, "Does violence have the last word?" He challenges Jesus to show him another power to match the forces of demonism which were operative in his world. He cries to Jesus, "Show me this power which you possess! If there is another power, show it to me!" In the presence of the disturbed father and the impotent disciples Jesus released a new kind of power in the world, a power which only comes except through fasting and praying. And strange as it may seem, this power, the power by fasting and praying, the power which comes through commitment to Jesus and his way of life was sufficient to meet the force of the demons. This is God's new power, a power which aids our faith even though our faith may be pressed down by the pressures of the twentieth century. Today when we are confronted with the demonic forces which interplay around our lives we may take comfort in the fact that Jesus has released into the world a new kind of power, a power which is healing, liberating, emancipating, and saving. We cry with the father of the demon-possessed child, "Lord, I believe!"

# 4

## WHOLENESS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

There met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit . . . . I adjure you by God, do not torment me . . . .  
"Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

—Mark 5:2-8

Mark 5:1-20 has been described variously by New Testament scholars. Rudolf Bultmann refers to it as "Miracle of Healing";<sup>1</sup> Martin Dibelius, "As a Tale";<sup>2</sup> Vincent Taylor, "Miracle Story";<sup>3</sup> and Allen Richardson terms it "A Wonder Story,"<sup>4</sup> capable of theological elaboration. For us following the impressions of our "early theological training," Mark 5:1-20 may be called a miracle. The importance of miracles in the New Testament cannot be overestimated, especially in the Gospel of Mark where 31 percent of the subject matter may be classified as miracle stories.

There is sufficient evidence in the Synoptic Gospels to justify the assumption that Jesus regarded miracles as evidence of the drawing near of the kingdom of God. The early church believed that the powers of the new age were manifested in these acts of Jesus. More significantly, the so-called miracle stories were used by the preachers and teachers of the New Testament period as preaching and teaching material. These early preachers believed that the miracles were an integral part of the message of Jesus, that they were tokens of God's reign in Jesus. They were understood as the kingdom of God in action—God's solvent grace and forgiveness operative in Jesus. These New Testament preachers believed that Jesus was the Son of God in a unique and significant sense and that in him the spirit of God was uniquely incarnated and that his will was synonymous with the Divine will. Because they believed this, they contended that there was nothing inherently absurd or incredible in the supposition that such a one must have had control over the sicknesses and ills of men. Possibly this may be one of the reasons why Joachim Held insists that the miracle stories in the Gospel of Matthew are used to underscore and delineate the themes of Christology, discipleship, and faith.<sup>5</sup> In Mark 5:1-20, you will find all three of these themes explicated.

The form critics—Bultmann, Dibelius, and Taylor—argue that

this miracle recorded in Mark 5:1-20 possesses a certain literary form which consists in a threefold division of the narrative: (1) the condition of the patient is described, (2) the description of the cure is given, (3) the effect of the cure is demonstrated. Looking at this miracle story from the human side, A. M. Hunter notes three characteristics or emphases: (1) the emphasis on faith as a precondition for miracles, (2) the emphasis Jesus placed on the power of prayer, (3) the emphasis upon divine action which makes the miracle possible.<sup>6</sup>

The christological significance of this miracle cannot be overemphasized in that it underscores at least three basic affirmations concerning Jesus: (1) Jesus Christ is a source of sanity and order; (2) the power of God is present in Jesus Christ so as to bring order and peace to the inner world of man; (3) Jesus can deal with the chaos within and without man.

For purposes of exposition we will divide Mark 5:1-20 into four sections. Verses 1-5 deal with a description of the demon-possessed man; 6-13 describe the encounter of the demon-possessed man with Jesus; 14-17 depict reaction of the herdsmen and the new sanity which the demon-possessed man received from Jesus; 18-20 deal with the commission of Jesus Christ to the man who had been possessed. Now let us consider these sections in the order given.

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones (1-5).

"There met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." The demon-possessed man is described variously. He is a mentally disabled man, an unclean man, a charged man, a bound man, a crying man, a bruised man, a splintered man, a wretched man, a hopeless man, a restless man—this wretched creature who defies description lived in a tomb. To be sure, it takes a certain type of mentality to live in a tomb. It takes a certain type of person to live in a tomb, that is, men and women whose mentality permit them to live in tombs of yesterday, who pine and cry for the good old days. They lay on the living present the dead hand of the past. The greatest obstacles to social and spiritual progress is created by those who have their being in the tombs of yesterday! Think of the men and women in our own day who bring to a new age nothing but



the obsolete reiterations of the good old times. Men and women who live in an age of potential abundance and when confronted with hunger, misery, and poverty, try to straitjacket the very bounty of God with the cutthroat methods used in an age of scarcity. Think of those who when confronted with the whole race problem have nothing to say but the mere repetition of ancient prejudices and hatred and unfounded generalizations. Nothing is more stifling and choking to the human spirit than tombed existence!

This *tombed man* confronts us with a social problem and demands that we deal with it. The Gerasenes' method has been practiced by many institutions, governments, societies, and cultures. The social problems are bound with fetters and chains and placed in a tomb. But the institutions who have practiced the Gerasenes' method have discovered that the chains are wrenched and the fetters are broken in pieces and no one has the strength to subdue or solve social problems using this method. The Gerasenes' method is a classic example of a belief in force as the only way to deal with a grave social problem. But force is no solution at all. Poverty has been treated with stone walls and iron bars and there is no healing in the stone wall or the iron bars. There are still multitudes who approach the complexities of industrial dispute and acute social problems with nothing more than fetters and chains, stone walls and iron bars, mumbling over and over again, crack down—law and order. They crack down, they shout law and order, but they discover to their dismay that "no one had the strength to subdue him," much less restore health and well being.

And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea (6-13).

"And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him." Here the christological implication of this passage is brought to the forefront. Even though the tombed man was demented, splintered, bruised, and unclean, when confronted with Jesus, he caught a ray of hope and he ran to Jesus and worshiped him. Jesus Christ is the

source of sanity and order! He is the power of God's presence to, for, and with man so as to bring order and peace to the inner world of our splintered selves. Jesus Christ is the source of salvation and wholeness, and as the demon-possessed man ran to Jesus he cried out with a loud voice "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." There is here, you see, *a question and a plea*. He asks Jesus, What do we have in common? You are the source of sanity and I the incarnation of insanity, disorder, splinteredness, wretchedness, and hopelessness. What do we have in common? The answer is, Jesus has much to do with the individual who is disordered in body and mind. Jesus has much to do with illness and the bringing of the gifts of faith—peace of mind and security, the calming of fears and neurotic storms, the calling forth of new interests and lifting life out of the shallow miseries of self-concern. Jesus has much to do with the chaotic lives torn with conflicting desires, making anarchy rather than building a kingdom. Jesus has much to do with our fragmentation which is nothing less than a personal disaster. Jesus has much to do with coming into disintegrated lives and making of the many, one. This is what Jesus has in common with every life that is splintered, chaotic, disintegrated, confused.

The tombed man recognizes, however, that healing would involve the experience of pain, and he makes a plea to Jesus, "Do not torment me." We have heard of Jesus as the truth, the life, as the incarnation of love and goodness. But here Jesus is referred to as a *tormentor*. I remember a sentence from Alfred N. Whitehead who wrote that religion is "the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion."<sup>7</sup> When we find ourselves confused and distraught, splintered, bruised, restless, bound and torn apart by many conflicting reactions to diverse situations, lacking the knowledge of God which brings wholeness and peace to the soul, *God is the void*. But when God confronts us he does so as *the enemy, the tormentor*; he demands something of us which we find painful to give, a radical readjustment, reorientation, and a new discipline. At this stage, God is the tormentor, more tormenting than the demons which possess us. But as we make the required adjustment, the required acknowledgment, the required surrender, God becomes the *companion*, the giver of wholeness, peace, sustaining and strengthening one's inner life.

The beginning of the healing comes when the demon-possessed man answers the question of Jesus—"What is your name?" The demon-possessed man replies, "My name is Legion; for we are many." These words underscore possibly one of the great services of Jesus to the individual: the integration of personality. We need the unification of life and the end of the inner civil war by the great peace

of unified mind and spirit. The demon-possessed man was a number rather than a name. His personality was splintered, six thousand. My name, he cries, is Legion! There are many persons in me pulling in opposite directions, many conflicting voices in the town meeting in my mind. I am not a person, I am a mob. The malady of the demon-possessed man is the great sickness of all of us. There is the need for unity, for integration, and for wholeness.

The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood (14-17).

Jesus Christ is the source of salvation and wholeness. He issues the word of authority: "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" There is here the business of salvation, the creation of wholeness, as pictured in the transformation from "crying out, and bruising himself with stones" to "clothed and in his right mind" seated at the feet of Jesus. "And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, . . . and they were afraid." The townspeople were afraid of sanity and they were afraid of Jesus. As Luke writes, "they were afraid," and they were "seized with great fear."

The townspeople had adjusted themselves to insanity. A sane mind was a disturbing reality. This is not near as fantastic as it appears because many people today who are contending for the continuing of some existing social order, custom, or way of life because it works to their advantage, fear sanity more than insanity. An insane society is afraid of a man in his right mind. The disciples of white supremacy fear the interpretation which a sane mind brings to the matter of racism. Need I remind you of what has happened in our own country during the past years? How the sane minds of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. so disturbed this country with their ideas of democracy and love that our insane, intoxicated society could not tolerate their presence.

There are those among us today who prefer the evils of disorder to the sanity of mind and spirit. These townspeople had but one objective in dealing with Jesus and they "began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood." I know what you are saying—"Imagine people so blind and stupid that they ordered Jesus to get out of their town." Is the picture of people begging Jesus to keep out of their ways of life and society so strange to us today? Do we

not resent the same Jesus for the same reasons? Jesus is a disturber, an upsetter of our way of life. Jesus causes embarrassment to the local chamber of commerce, to our cities, our churches, our families, and our institutions. The townspeople of Gerasa were familiar with demented people. They had managed to do well with the demon-possessed man exiled to the local tombs. They feared change! They feared the presence of Jesus! They feared the presence of a power of restoration! They shouted to the ears of Jesus, "Get out!"

And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. But he refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled (18-20).

"Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." It is but natural that the restored man would want to remain in the presence of Jesus. "I begged him that I might be with him." All of us who have been recipients of the restoration of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of us want to remain in his presence. But the command of Jesus is final: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Jesus is saying in effect, go into the familiar and accustomed world and there declare your witness to the power and the love of Christ. Go home, says Jesus. Go into the family and into the workshop, into the civil life where there is endless need for effective witness.

## MAN'S HELPLESSNESS AND THE POWER OF CHRIST

When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" . . . Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.

—John 5:6, 8-9

The evangelist of the Fourth Gospel presents to the world his understanding of Jesus, the Liberator as the giver of life and the source of truth and wisdom. These functions of Jesus in this gospel are tied into the very fabric of the evangelist's understanding of the meaning and significance of Jesus for triumphant living. In the second chapter of the Fourth Gospel Jesus is presented as the one who has the power to enhance human life. In the fourth chapter Jesus rescues life from the immediate threat of death and destruction. In our text this morning, Jesus rescues a life from the very clutches of death.

Arthur H. Clough in his poem "Bethesda" has presented some suggestive thoughts which are inspired by this narrative:

I saw again the spirits on a day  
Where on the earth in mournful case they lay;  
Five porches were there, and a pool and round,  
Huddling in blankets, strewn upon the ground,  
Tied-up and bandaged, weary, sore, and spent,  
The maimed and halt, diseased and impotent.<sup>1</sup>

*Let us consider some of the problems presented to us in our text about the nature of the Christian faith and the place and function of the church in the world.* Granted that the Christian faith is concerned with the beautiful, the true, and the good, is it adequate to deal with the mean, ugly, and debased aspects of existence as we know it? Does the Christian faith possess the power—the life-giving power—to deal with a man who spent more than half a life in a devitalized condition—a condition in which the man was as good as dead? Is the Christian faith able and does it possess the power and the moral strength to deal with the Bethesdas of a thousand cities

where men and women are caught in the torrent waters of moral corruption and tied by the iron threads of vice and disease? Is the Christian faith able to give the adequate answers to the persistent problems which beset men—*anxiety, guilt, nothingness, fate, and death*? As Jesus stands over this one man of the text, this wretched, helpless man, he appears to be saying, “If my powers are not adequate and cannot prevail for this one man here, then there is nothing in them.” He has proved that his powers are adequate. He proved it then and he keeps on proving it. He has made available his life-giving powers to millions—men, women, and children—who have been lifted to their feet.

Bethesda poses a problem concerning the availability of Christ. Our text teaches us that there is no place, however devoid of hope, that is inaccessible to him or which he has forgotten. This is a miracle of the Christian faith—the miracle expressed in the life-giving powers released by Jesus in the world to save. Jesus is in the business of rescuing the perishing, of making the nobodies into the somebodies, of making available divine resources which give men the power to live the abundant life.

This passage also says something to the church which is none other than an extension of mind, heart, power, and work of Jesus in the world—that the test of its power and strength is determined by its ability to release into the world the life-giving, healing, restoring powers of the Son of God. You see, we are not so much speaking about the Bethesda of 1900 years ago, but the Bethesas which are present in every city, hamlet, and village in our nation. Bethesda is a place, a condition, and a state of mind. It is where men are caught in the steel traps of life. It is where men and women seek to escape the terrible and frightening aspects of existence by drugs and alcohol. It exists where men and women no longer live but merely exist like animals and attempt to satisfy the deep hungers of the soul with the slop of the world! Bethesda is a place where men are victimized and exploited, oppressed and denied the right to exist as human beings of worth and value in our American society. Bethesda is a place where men are crushed by the ruthless and brutalizing forces of our impersonal technological world and where the mingled spirits of men are ground to powder on the ever-moving wheels of our mechanistic and materialistic society. What word of hope may be wrested from our text for the living of these days? We believe that four basic affirmations are made concerning Jesus, the Liberator. It tells us about where Jesus, the Liberator is; what Jesus, the Liberator saw and sees; what Jesus, the Liberator knows and asks; and what Jesus, the Liberator did and does.

*Consider, first, where Jesus, the Liberator is.* If you had been in Jerusalem on this sabbath, where would you have looked for him?

To be sure, many would have looked for him in the temple and would have expected that he would either be teaching rabbinical students or acting as the high priest during the temple's religious service. Others would have expected to find Jesus in the guest chamber of the number one citizen of Jerusalem surrounded by and in conversation with the high, the noble, and the mighty. Still others might have expected him to be delivering some lecture to a selected audience made up of professors from the university, judges, prime ministers, the rulers of the city, and other important people who kept the wheels of government, industry, and the church turning. If you had looked in these places, you would have looked in vain. On this sabbath occasion Jesus, the Liberator is to be found in the porches of Bethesda where a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed lay. Jesus is at Bethesda mingling with the pathetic crowd of broken humanity. He is moved to the depth of his being as he surveys man in his utter helplessness.

Where the greatest need manifests itself, one can expect to find Jesus, the Liberator. He is always present where the need is deepest, where the call is most urgent, where the desperation is most acute, where sorrow and anxiety cut sharp across the days, and men utter muffled cries for help and deliverance. That is where Jesus, the Liberator is. Possibly one of the reasons why he is not present in our lives, in our homes, churches, cities, institutions, and country is because we labor under the false notion that we do not need him, that we can get along without him. Wherever and whenever Jesus is absent, men become invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed!

Jesus appears, we repeat, whenever men confess their need of him. He appeared to the hungry crowds of Galilee who were like sheep without a shepherd. He appeared to the widow of Nain in the depth of her grief and despair. He appeared to Mary and Martha when death had snatched from them their loved one. He appeared to the disciples in the midst of a storm and uttered his word of peace and calm. He appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and warmed their hearts. He appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, to John on the Isle of Patmos, to Luther at Worms, and Wesley at Aldersgate. He appeared to the founders of our church and gave solace, comfort, and strength as they launched this church on the turbulent waters of time and history. The fact is that wherever and whenever men and women feel the need of his presence, when they call him out of the depth of their being, Jesus, the Liberator always answers—always present.

*Second, consider what Jesus, the Liberator saw and sees.* Here in the text Jesus, the Liberator appears at the pool of Bethesda and he sees sick men and women. They were helpless men and women who in their misery thought that their hope lay in the bubbling wa-



ters of Bethesda and in the strength of man to cast them in the pool at the precise time. Salvation by bubbling waters—natural phenomena and human resource!

Let us not ridicule these weak, helpless, and frightened people of Bethesda. We too at times have placed our faith in bubbles—natural or scientific phenomena. We have believed that improved physical facilities alone—a new physical plant, cushioned seats, carpeted floors, air conditioning units, robed choirs—could bring to the church spiritual renewal and a revivifying of the life of its constituency. This is a bubble and we know it because physical improvements, to be sure, are desirable but they in themselves are not the ultimate answer for the paralysis, blindness, and lameness of our members! We have placed our hopes on human resources—more manpower, unassisted and unaided by the power of Holy Spirit, to get the job done. This is another bubble and it will soon burst in our faces! Human resources are needed, but unless they are strengthened and directed by the workings of the Holy Spirit which has been released into the world through Jesus, the Liberator, all is in vain. Except the Lord build the house—his mind, power, purpose, and direction—they who labor, labor in vain. The bubbles to which men gave their allegiance will eventually burst and men will find themselves on their bellies, groping in fear and in darkness.

Jesus saw sick people—*asthenounton*. Now this Greek word is used to describe a type and kind of existence and at the same time it depicts a state of religious living. One who exists in this state is “just here and that’s all.” So many people are “just here and that’s all.” Their lives have neither flavor nor vitality. They are “just here and that’s all”—just here in school, just here in the church, just here as pastor, just here as presiding elders, just here as bishops, and that’s all! To be sick in this sense is an accurate description of our half-converted existence. We are not dead in sin and we are not religiously healthy. We are too sick to live and not sick enough to die. We are here and that’s all.

Jesus saw and sees blind men—men without mental discernment, blind to their own impotence, wretchedness, and desperate condition, blind to the divine and moral glory of Jesus, the Liberator who stood in their midst. They were lame men—crippled men who could not stand on their own feet. They were lame in courage, lame in faith, lame ethically and morally. They were withered men—dry and very dry. What a condition. Blind eyes, crippled feet, paralyzed hands, unable to see, unable to walk, unable to work. They were waiting to be liberated, waiting to be delivered, waiting to be rescued.

*Consider what Jesus, the Liberator knows and asks.* Our text says, “When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a

long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" Thank God, Jesus, the Liberator knows! He knew that this man had been there for thirty-eight years. He knew that every day he had tried jumping desperately on his impotent feet and useless limbs, trying to reach the pool, and sometimes he almost made it. For always, someone else with friendly hands to help him pushed past him, or in the jostle he was brushed aside and once more he would crawl back to the too familiar place where he had lain so long. And some fourteen thousand times in all! Jesus says to this lame man, "I know all about you, your feebleness, pain, suffering, strivings, and disappointments." Jesus says to us today and to those pioneering spirits who founded our church, "I know all about you, your sufferings, loneliness, sorrows, ups and downs; your burdens, your troubled minds." I say to you this morning, Jesus knows. Yes, he knows just how much we can bear.

Jesus asked the lame man and he asks us, "Do you want to be healed? You ought to know that there is something wrong with you and that you have placed your faith and hope in that which avails nothing." "Do you want to be healed?" says Jesus. "Are you willing to put yourself, just as you are, in my hands? Are you willing and ready to let me mold you and make you according to my will? Are you ready for me to do for you what you are unable to do for yourself and what no one else can do for you except me? Are you willing to be in my debt for the rest of your life and to live as a freedman, a liberated one, in me?" It is only when we are willing to surrender ourselves to him that he performs a miracle. No wonder we sing the words of Charlotte Elliott:

Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

*Consider, finally, what Jesus, the Liberator did and does.* Jesus, the Liberator standing over this man says to him, "If you are willing to put yourself in my hands; if you are willing to trust me then take up your bed and walk." At this precise moment in the life of this man a new kind of power was experienced.

We live in a power-intoxicated age. By the term power we mean organized effort to achieve a desired goal. If we were asked to classify our age, we would call it "the age of power." The power phrases have become part of our vocabularies. There is "white power," "black power," "green power," "intellectual power," "brain power," "military power," and "scientific power" to name a few. Man stands bewildered as the power forces are displayed around him. He is amazed by the display of brain power. He is shocked by

the presence of scientific power because through technological instruments man has brought the whole physical world to his feet. Man is stunned by the display of military power. The arsenal of destruction which man has developed staggers the imagination. In the military combines of our nation, there is sufficient weaponry to destroy every individual on the face of the earth fifteen times! The use and exercise of these powers have not brought to the world community peace or stability. Jesus, the Liberator knew and knows that if man is to be saved it must be by a power over and beyond the powers of this age. The power which Jesus brings is resurrection power and it was released into the life of this lame man at the pool. For our lameness and impotence resurrection power brings health and healing. For our blindness and helplessness resurrection power gives insight and vision. For our mortality and corruption resurrection power gives immortality and eternal life. "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk," says Jesus. "Demonstrate to the world the presence of this new power in your life by carrying that which had carried you." To experience this resurrection power is to burst out in a hymn of praise to Jesus, the Liberator.

Resurrection power is God's power made available through Jesus Christ for man's salvation and renewal. The quest for Black Power may eventually lead one to an awareness of himself which is novel; it may enable him to participate in making decisions about one's own life, but Black Power cannot satisfy man's deepest need—the need for a savior. Green power may make available the material resources of our capitalistic society, but it is unable to fortify the soul during life's deepest crises. Brain power may develop a technology which will enable man's foot to touch the surface of the moon, but it is unable to transform the character or reorient one's life so as to provide the fullness which God intended.

Modern man needs these powers. Over and above his need for these powers is a need which arises from the depth of his being and is of ultimate concern to him. This power is resurrection power. Resurrection power is love—a love with compassion and yet strong enough to survive the terrifying madness of Calvary and yet keep on loving. It is a love that is spontaneous, possessing the capacity to bear all things, to believe all things, and to endure all things. Resurrection power is that kind of love which stands up for man when everything else "stands down." It is a love which reaches down and lifts up. Those who have experienced this resurrection power which is none other than the love of God know how to sing the hymn by George Matheson:

O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

Resurrection power is faith; it is hope and it is victory. All of these aspects of the character of resurrection power are presented to us in the moving words of Paul recorded in Romans 8:35, 37-39, **NEB**:

Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? . . . And yet, in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTICAL HARVEST

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. . . . And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.

—Galatians 6:7, 9

Our text for this morning lends itself to many striking translations. John Knox translates, "Make no mistake about it; you cannot cheat God. A man will reap what he sows." I like Phillips' translation: "Don't be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows."<sup>1</sup> Moffatt translates, "Make no mistake—God is not to be mocked—a man will reap just what he sows."<sup>2</sup>

In this magnificent chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians he seeks to set forth two basic principles which are ingrained in the universe. The first is the principle of Christian mutuality in which Paul sets forth the idea that life is both a solo and a chorus. Every man is called upon to bear his own burden but he is also required to bear the burdens of others. The task of Christian mutuality is one of restoring, repairing, and refitting oneself and others to rejoin the spirit and of foreseeing and preventing future lapses by creating an environment in which the will of God may be done.

However, we are concerned now with the second principle—the principle of identical harvest. In this passage Paul argues that there are certain conditions upon which God blesses congregations. One of these is that they do well by their ministers. Let them not then be deceived; you cannot "hoodwink" God. It is impossible to pull the wool over God's eyes. Let no one think God will act independently of his own regulations or reverse them for their particular benefit. It is only as these Christians do well by their spiritual teachers that they shall prosper.

*Let us consider this principle—the law of identical harvest—in its generality and see the relationship of the seedtime to the harvest.* We note that the sower is also the reaper. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "A man will reap what he sows." "A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows." The



seed he puts into the ground he gets back in the form of fruit. Everywhere and in every field this arrangement is carried out. A seed is a force, has power stored up in it which does not yet appear. It may be buried in the dry earth for centuries; but under favoring conditions, it will burst forth, spring up, and come to maturity. And this is what is analogous within the spiritual sphere. All human life is a sowing. Whether we think of it or not, every time that we think and feel and exercise our wills we are sowing. All our acts are forces which unite and form character.

"Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap," is the postulate for all moral responsibility. It undergirds the idea that the continuity of human existence is an undeniable and inescapable fact. It suggests the idea that man through his own choices is to a certain degree, the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. One's future depends on present choices because in a real sense "the child is the father of the man." "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap," reminds us that our actions do not expire with their performances or words with their utterances or thoughts with the thinking of them. The God who is the Creator of the world of nature and who determines its laws and regulations is also the one who fixes the laws for the moral, intellectual, and spiritual realms. Such laws which govern these realms are expressions of his infinite love and wisdom. The laws of the moral, spiritual, and intellectual realms are fixed and absolute and the desire to escape from these is comparable to the desire to resist and ignore the law of gravitation.

We ought to this morning take comfort in this great principle. It works in the realm of ideas. It says to the student if he studies and sows the seeds of knowledge he will reap the fruits of his labors. It took Kant thirty-two years to write his critiques. Heidegger used forty-seven years mastering his ontological philosophy—in planting seeds. Paul Tillich employed thirty years writing his *Systematic Theology*. Einstein devoted his entire life to discovering a key to the universe. Norbert Rillieux invested a lifetime in perfecting what is called the Rillieux process in the production of sugar. Jan Ernst Matzeliger worked ten years in developing a machine which could "last" shoes. George Washington Carver, who is called the "savior of southern agriculture" sacrificed his life discovering the secrets of the peanut and sweet potato and presented to the world a scientific method which could be used in improving the good earth. Daniel Hale Williams devoted years of research which culminated in his performing the first successful operation on the human heart. Charles R. Drew became the great pioneer in blood plasma research. These men sowed—they were the great sowers in the realm of the intellect but they were also the great reapers. This principle operates in the spiritual realm and is convincingly illustrated in the lives of St. Paul,

St. Francis, Martin de Porres, Augustus Tolton, Thomas Paul, Richard Allen, James Varick, and William Henry Miles. Because these men sowed in the spiritual realm they have become for us the great interpreters of the Christian faith. So, if we do not sow we do not reap. Let us then not be deceived. God is not mocked. Let us not think that he will not do what he is constantly teaching us in the realm of nature. This is the great teaching, the irreversible law of God's natural and moral universe which holds these worlds together and provides for the regularity and order in them.

It is well for us to remember that we reap in the same kind that we sow. (Whatsoever a man soweth *that* shall he also reap, or a man's *harvest* in life will depend entirely on what he *sows*.) We are familiar with this, too, in nature. If we sow cabbage seeds, we will reap cabbages; if we sow potatoes, we will reap potatoes; if we sow in our fields oats, there will not grow up barley; if we sow barley, there will not grow up wheat. The type of what is sown is impressed on what is produced from it, and the analogy is carried out within the spiritual sphere. We reap in the same kind that we sow. The character of our actions is stamped upon the results that they produce in our nature. We are only liberal as we have acted liberally. We are only devout as we have cultivated devout habits. Wisdom does not spring from the same kind of seed as zeal; nor gentleness from the same kind of seed as courage. Whatever fruit we have we must sow in that kind. If we sow the seeds of disloyalty, distrust, and hatred in our national life, we will reap exactly and precisely what we have sowed—disloyalty, distrust, and hatred. If we plant in the field of our society the seeds of prejudice and racism, we will produce a society which is racist and prejudiced in its very essence and nature. If we sow the seeds of confusion and disloyalty in the field of our Christian fellowship, it will be warped, twisted, and corrupted by these seeds which will certainly grow. On the other hand, if we sow the seeds of love, peace, gentleness, and kindness in the fields of society, education, technology, and the Church, we will reap the just fruits of our labors. Let us not then be deceived. Let us not think that God will disregard his own appointment—like seed, like harvest. Let us not think we can sow hate and reap love; that we can sow self-centeredness and reap altruism. The kind that we sow in our actions, and none other, determines what we reap.

*Second, as we sow to the flesh or to the spirit, what we reap is corruptible or incorruptible.* What does the expression sowing to the flesh mean? On the surface this expression means doing what is right in one's own eyes. It denotes that kind of action which is completely without regard to the will of God. In the thought of Paul, the term flesh is used to refer to many things, but more pro-

foundly to that which is outward and visible. To live according to the flesh means to exist on externalities or appearances. It means to live according to the wisdom of the world. According to Paul, a man's nature is not determined by what he may be as to substance nor by what qualities he may have. Rather man's nature is determined by the sphere within which he moves—that which determines the horizon or the possibilities of what he does and experiences. To sow to the flesh is to live in the sphere of the obvious or earthly human. It is to live a sterile life which stamps one's existence or attitudes not as natural human but as sinful. To live in the flesh is to live believing that man's deepest needs can be satisfied by the physical and the earthly and that the goal and the good of human existence can be found in these. He who lives or sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. We know what corruption is. We know about the offensiveness connected with wet, decayed vegetable matter and we are aware of the fact that there is nothing so offensive as the human body in the state of corruption. And that is but a suggestion of what one's life is like in a state of corruption. Let us not think that we can break God's laws with impunity. Let us not think that we can sin and have the freshness and beauty of holiness. It is impossible. Sin is working its work of deterioration even here. It is bringing the elements of death into our nature. It is as though mortification in all its loathsomeness were proceeding in our various powers. And it is the most solemn fact of existence that if we die in sin, then, as certainly as there is righteousness in the character of God, will retribution follow us in this world and the next.

On the other hand, the divine ordering is that sowing to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap eternal life. There is nothing within the material sphere which can fitly set forth what this life is. As spirit is finer than matter, so is spiritual life finer than the most lovely flower, the most beautiful human bodily form. It has especially the element of imperishableness, eternity. Flowers quickly fade; the most beautiful face loses its freshness. But the life that is begun in God and carried on in God shall be eternal as God himself. Let us not, then, be deceived. God is not mocked. It is only by sowing to the spirit that we can get beautiful and imperishable elements into our life. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil. 4:8, kjv)."

That is the order of the divine government which we must observe if we would be beautified with the divine beauty and immortalized with the divine immortality. Seeing, then, that God cannot

deny himself, must honor his own arrangement, let us learn the supreme importance of sowing to the spirit. There is nothing in this principle, rightly considered, which militates against the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. For the great Substitute of mankind came under the broken law, which had its full course in him. He reaped, in the terrible experience of abandonment, what we sowed in our sins. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows (Isa. 53:4, kjv)." And, therefore, we can reap a rich harvest of forgiveness. But it needs to be borne in mind as a complementary truth, that after we are forgiven, we have still to contend against depraved tendency, and especially against the results of our previous sinful life. And it is also to be borne in mind that we can only have the harvest of life eternal insofar as we have thought out the divine thoughts and carried out the divine will. Let us not be deceived. God is not mocked. In no other way can it be secured by us.

*Finally, encouragement against weariness in well-doing is a promise of God.* Paul has enunciated the principle of mutuality and the principle of identical harvest, and now he underscores the principle of life at harvest time. He admonishes the church: "And let us not grow weary in well-doing" or as Moffatt translates, "Never let us grow tired of doing what is right."<sup>3</sup> "Because in due season," "at the opportune season," or, "for after a while, we shall reap our harvest," "the ultimate harvest is assured," or, "we will reap a harvest of blessing."

If we do not grow weary, if we do not faint, lose heart, relax, give up, we will reap. This miracle, this principle of life at harvest time keeps the farmer in business who year after year defies the uncertainties of nature and prays to the Lord of the harvest. The farmer believes that no adverse weather, nor greedy landlord, no marauding enemy, could take from him the harvest time. In the process of "keep on keeping on" we do grow weary, have the tendency to lose heart, and sometimes feel like giving up.

Let us examine the causes of our weariness. In the first place, there are discouragements connected with the nature of well-doing. It is under a high impulse that we begin the life of well-doing. It is the kind of life that is farthest removed from selfishness. It requires a large infusion of the spirit in which Christ regarded men. But we have still to do with the matter-of-fact world. We are not placed above the ordinary cares and difficulties of life. These may increase with us and may act upon us so as to tend to weariness in well-doing. We have to give out largely, too, of our best strength in well-doing. To be burdened with the souls of men is exhausting beyond anything else. And the more intensely we care for souls, the more are we laid open to a feeling of weariness.

Second, there are discouragements connected with the association

of well-doing. We may not like the scenes of discomfort, squalor, and vice into which well-doing brings us. We may feel the want of suitable appliances for engaging in well-doing. We may feel the want of hearty cooperation. Some to whom we had reason to look may fail us, having become cold in the work. Some fellow workers in the same society may be more intent on getting their own way than on the advancement of the common cause, if they do not even resort to slander and obstruction. And all these things are causes of weariness.

Third, there are especially discouragements connected with the results of well-doing. In other work we can, to a large extent, walk by sight. We feel the encouraging influence of results. There is something to show for what our hands have done every day. But in well-doing there is little to show in the shape of results. There is something to be seen, indeed, if we feed the hungry and clothe the naked. And there are also results that can be tested if we engage in communicating knowledge to the young and the ignorant. But if we seek to influence men's hearts through gospel truth, we may have to say, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" We may labor on, and some may appear further removed from good than they were. Some who appeared to be established may show deterioration or may fall grievously, to our great amazement and sorrow. Or, if we meet with outward tokens of success, in the very moment of success it may be felt to be unsatisfying. It may not be real when tested by time. And we may afterwards be disappointed in some upon whom we reckoned as savingly influenced. And there are wearying influences that come in from a wider range. It may seem as if there were but poor results from the money and labor spent on missions. It may seem as if little inroads were made upon the domain of evil. It may seem as if the church were losing its wonted fire, as if it were feeling the chilling influence of the world. It may seem as if iniquity were abounding, and because iniquity abounds, our love and that of many others is apt to wax cold.

We cannot remove the causes of weariness in well-doing. We cannot escape the temptation to be weary. What we have to do is to refuse to yield to the temptation. "Let us not be weary"—that is the word which the apostle sends forth to all who are inclined to be weary in well-doing. Let us learn a lesson from what we see going on in nature. The sower does not see his harvest the day he sows his seed. He has to begin by putting his seed out of sight, and it is a time before the plant appears above ground. And then he has to wait until nature slowly brings it forward to maturity. But if, in the face of what he does not yet see, he faints not under the burning heat of the sun, then he shall assuredly one day be privileged to



bring the ripe grain into the stackyard. For God has appointed a season for this. So let us learn in the face of all discouragements connected with well-doing, especially in the face of what we do not yet see of results, that if we faint not, if we lose not faith in God, in the mighty influences of the Divine Spirit, in the converting efficacy of the divine message, in the binding nature of the divine command, and if we lose not hope for man—then in due season we shall assuredly reap. We shall reap in our own souls, in the blessing God shall not delay to send on us for engaging, unweariedly, in well-doing. And what is more to the purpose of well-doing, we shall reap in others, in the blessing which God shall send upon them, not immediately or within our observation, but perhaps in due season, as the result of tearful prayers and labors which he never forgets. Let us, then, cast our bread, though it may be as upon the waters, and we shall find it, though it may be after many days. God has his own time and way of bringing the seed forward, and it may be long after we are dead and gone that the fruit shall be gathered in.

“We shall reap, if we do not lose heart!” What a promise! What an assurance! Let all of us believe this promise and embrace this affirmation—the young and old, the weak and strong, the high and low, the learned and unlearned. Let us continue in this work, in the liberating ministry of Jesus Christ, “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” “We shall reap” keeps the farmer in the field, the scientist at his desk with tools and chemicals, the missionary at his post of duty. “We shall reap” keeps the theologian attempting to understand the mind and ways of God, the philosopher struggling to present a complete and systematic interpretation of the meaning of life and history, inspires the poet to develop new forms of verse and style through which he may declare those things which are deeper than thought. “We shall reap” keeps the preacher proclaiming the liberating news of the Son of God, the singer singing hymns of praise and triumph, the laborer working in the vineyard of the Master, the martyr ready to live and die for the liberation of his people. “We shall reap” kept Jesus steadfast in his ministry, brought the church into existence, and inspired our founding fathers. “We shall reap” is a command and promise to those who have committed themselves to Jesus, the Liberator, following where he leads and dedicated to the ideas and causes for which he lived and died. As we keep on keeping on, those of us who have ears to hear will hear the triumphant and victorious voices of our fathers singing:

Walk together children, Don't you get weary,  
Walk together children, Don't you get weary,

Oh talk together children, Don't you get weary,  
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.

Gwin-ter mourn and never tire,  
Mourn and never tire,  
Mourn and never tire,  
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.

Sing together children, Don't you get weary,  
Sing together children, Don't you get weary,  
Shout together children, Don't you get weary,  
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.

Gwin-ter mourn and never tire,  
Mourn and never tire,  
Mourn and never tire,  
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.<sup>4</sup>

## JESUS, THE LEADER

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

—Mark 8:34

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

—Galatians 2:20

The New Testament contains both the indicative and the imperative: the indicatives which proclaim God's works and the imperatives which summon men to action. Some theologians have for the most part dealt only with the indicatives so that the imperatives have been neglected. Some moralists have overstressed the imperatives of the New Testament because of their ethical concern and as a result the redemptive and saving act of God in Jesus Christ has been thrown in the background. Some modern theologians have sought to embrace both of these aspects of the Christian faith in one dialectical paradox: Man must act, although God has already accomplished everything. What has the New Testament to say on this theme?

The New Testament propounds an exactly opposite thesis: Man must act because God acts. Indicative and imperative belong together. Our text says: "If any man would come after me (indicative), let him deny himself (imperative) and take up his cross (imperative) and follow me" (imperative). God has acted and is still acting through his Son; God has invited us and he invites us through his Son to the high privilege of Christian discipleship—to accept Jesus as our Leader. If men accept this gracious invitation they must deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Jesus, the Leader.

*Let us consider who Jesus, the Leader is and the meaning of his cross.* Listen again to the words of our text: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me; for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever

loses his life for my sake will find it." To come after Jesus implies acceptance of him as the Leader.

Jesus as Leader is deeply embedded in both the church's tradition in general and in the black Christian experience in particular. We remember these lines of one of our gospel songs with deep appreciation:

Let Jesus lead you  
Let Jesus lead you  
All the way  
All the way from  
Earth to Heaven  
Let Jesus lead you  
All the way.

It is the unanimous conviction of the black witnessing Christian community that "he is a mighty good Leader." We ask, "Why is Jesus a mighty good Leader?" "Who is this Leader?" "What has he done and where does he lead?" To be sure, we are not talking about the docile, anemic, pale, blue-eyed, sickly white Christ of the white church establishment. This Christ is the enemy of the black man and of all the oppressed and exploited people of the world. Jesus who is our leader is the ghetto-bred lad of Nazareth who grew up in the rough and tumble of life. He was acquainted with suffering, pain, and anxiety and felt the relentless pressures of oppression and repression. He grew up in the bosom of the world and was therefore acquainted firsthand with the relentless conflicts which were the daily experiences of men.

This tough Jesus early in his ministry cast his lot with the weak, oppressed, and exploited peoples of the world. The essential thrust of his ministry was one of liberation in which he believed that he had been anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to give liberty to those who were in chains. He confronted men with God's eternal "Now." Liberation and reconciliation are the two foci of his ministry. He gave men liberty and showed them the path of reconciliation and through the ages they have accepted him as God's most decisive revelation to the world.

Jesus, the Leader is not only the supreme reformer of human nature. He is not merely the physician who heals this and that infected patch of humanity. Jesus, the Leader is not only the re-builder of waste places. Jesus, the Leader is all of this and more. He is the source and giver of life. In Jesus, the Leader men have believed that the very creative life of God stepped forth on the human platform to create a new mankind—God's new creation.

Jesus encountered evil as a sinister force and in every act he reached over and beyond it to deal with the tyrannical powers be-

hind it. There was in Jesus that which constituted a ceaseless assertion of power against the entrenched powers of this world; not merely of truth against falsehood, or right against wrong, of good against evil, but of power against power. He attacked bastions of wrong, and his very being and essential selfhood was a decisive offensive against sin, evil, and corruption. His mission in the world was militant and revolutionary and designed to change and transform the existing order of things. His own personality was the source of this revolutionary change by which the malignant powers were to be disposed.

In the long range he had come to bring peace, but not before the baptism of conflict and fire. Only after this conflict could he hold out in his bleeding, triumphant hands his everlasting gift to the world—peace. Until evil had been conquered and driven from the field and the aggressive and oppressive powers made his footstool, he was and is the militant and revolutionary Jesus, the Leader.

Jesus, our Leader entered the world not merely to make a passing visit but to transform and grasp the historical movement and keep it in his hands. We should not lose heart or be discouraged if he is temporarily engulfed by the hatred of men and fastened to a cross. He did so only to conquer the world and return as the victorious and triumphant one. If for a moment the grave is to claim him and confine him within its narrow walls, he will free himself through the open door made by God and come forth shouting: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." This is our Leader, the tough, emancipating, liberating, disturbing, saving Jesus of Nazareth—Lord and Savior of men!

Those who come after this Leader are required to participate in the ministry of cross-bearing. Among the charged symbols of mankind there is one that possesses an unusual variety of meanings and associations. It is the cross: the actual instrument of Christ's death, hence a symbol of suffering; first laid on his shoulders, an actual burden, as well as an actual product of human handiwork, and on both grounds a symbol of his accepted moral burden.

The cross is a natural symbol of crossroads, and therefore of decision, crisis, choice; of being crossed, of frustration, adversity, fate; and finally, to the artistic eye a cross is the figure of a man.

The story of Christianity is the penetration of the cross into more and more fields of human existence. Reality itself can be regarded as a cruciform. Says Eugene Rosenstock-Huessy, "Our existence is a perpetual suffering and wrestling with conflicting forces, paradoxes, contradiction within and without. By them we are stretched and torn in opposite directions, but through them comes renewal."<sup>1</sup>

A man's first care is to win himself, to find and use his true per-

sonality. This, says Jesus, can only be done when a man denies himself, disowns himself, refuses to admit that he himself has any value or need to be considered at all in any way, save as a means to an end, an instrument for achieving a given task. He must empty himself in order that he may be filled. And that which he has a right to expect is not a reward, a crown, or a throne; it is only a cross. Indeed, it is so probable that he will have to endure this last agony and shame, that he will do well to have his cross with him so that he may be prepared when the moment comes for him to use it. Thus, and only thus, by self-abnegation which carries him right to the point of the cross, can a man really find himself, be his true self, and play his own part on the stage of this world.

Bonhoeffer declares that when Jesus, the Leader calls a man, he bids him to come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus, the Leader, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Jesus, the Leader. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Jesus, the Leader and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for him. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: "He leads the way, keep close to him." The cross means sharing the suffering of Jesus, the Leader to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection.

To deny self, to accept Jesus as Leader is no easy matter. Deep down in each of us there are forces at work seeking to satisfy our personal desires and ambitions. This aspect of man's nature has been the object of study by psychologists, and we need their help if we are to understand ourselves in depth. The psychologists substantiate and support the claim of Jesus, namely, that man is in need of transformation, renewal, and restoration at the very center of his being. It was Freud who described the behavior of man in the language of force. He was first inclined to describe this as a life force—a vital principle that was creative, constructive, productive, pleasure-seeking. But as he continued to study his patients he found a savage destructiveness in them, a delight in smashing, killing, hurting, which he felt could be no mere secondary by-product of the thwarting of the creative urge. It was a primary force in its own right. Thus the id-stream was made to contain both red and black, forces of love and hate, creative life instincts and destructive death



instincts. Two world wars are sufficient revelation of the dark forces at the very center of man's being. The fang and claw of our animal forebears are still part of us; and our unconscious contains the forces that have always driven this fighting apparatus. Biologically, man is still a half-tamed, half-civilized creature. Around these cores of id-energy, character takes shape as the energy comes to terms with reality; and finally out of the competition of organ-systems an organization of forces emerges and assumes control over the total life of the individual.

Alfred Adler insisted that man is driven by certain basic desires: the desire to develop, to strive, to dominate, to rule, and even to compensate for defects in one direction by striving ruthlessly for success in another. There is in all of us this will to power, to demand, to rule. Carl Jung contended that the content of the self is made up of a stream of psychic energy which flows from every personality and gives it driving power. This driving, ruthless life force or energy may take one or two directions: either outward toward the external environment or inward toward one's subjective life patterns.

The events of the past five years certainly substantiated the findings of these psychologists. Something radical must be done to and for man. Jesus says man must deny himself! Paul says man must crucify himself! The problem confronts us: What can be done to tame this stream of psychic energy which contains the ocean of images and figures that shape our disposition and determine our character? How can we disinherit or reform this collective unconsciousness which fashions our moods and thoughts? Is there a savior who can redeem this mysterious creative power of life and satisfy our deepest human needs? Is there a master of the tempest who can speak "Peace, be still" to the turbulent and surging waters of hunger, thirst, aggression, and sexual desires deep in the center of our being? Can this mad creature of fang and claw, half-tamed and half-civilized, whose name is Legion and is chained to a tomb in a "graveyard existence," be clothed in his right mind and committed to a new master? What must be done to this ego and how shall we master it?

*Finally, man's true life is found in his commitment to Jesus, the Leader, involved and participating in his ministry of liberation and championing the causes for which he lived and died. This is the way out. This is man's ultimate answer to his deepest needs. The believer's leader is his liberator. Man is challenged to participate in a new kind of existence which may be called liberation existence—Christian existence—an existence in which the believer has accepted the command to follow the Liberator and to continue his ministry of liberation. The liberated one no longer lives to and for*

himself. He lives so that others may be liberated. Obedience to the Liberator relieves him from the so-called powers of the world—its pressures, excitements, false gods, pseudo norms and selfish strivings. The so-called social and class distinctions have lost their significance. The believer is free for all men and he becomes the “man for others” and a liberator for his neighbor.

Liberation is a form of renunciation but one which involves the very exercise of that liberation. Liberation is authorization in which the liberated one is free from all worldly cares to find his true self and by proving that which is good and true. Liberation existence is existence in love, through love, and by love. The liberated one is not bound by law in that he is bound to the Liberator and by being such he has a claim to those under the law and outside the law. Liberation existence is one of love and such an existence is possible only to him who is free from himself. The believer who has been liberated by Jesus, the Leader no longer lives for himself but for the liberator who has given him true life.

Liberation existence teaches us that a man's true life is found in consecration to Jesus, the Liberator. This consecration involves cross-bearing, an act in which the liberated one takes upon himself the burdens of others which become for him his cross. This is what Jesus did and this is what all must do who have accepted him as Leader, Liberator, and Lord.

Many black Americans who have been liberated have taken upon themselves the burdens of their fellowman. Most recently in our history we have seen this accomplished in the liberated lives of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and W. E. B. DuBois. These men and a host of others were committed to the Leader and because they had pledged their allegiance to him they could sing triumphantly the hymn,

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chast'ning rod  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path thro' the blood of the  
slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past, 'til now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.<sup>2</sup>

Liberation is in a most profound sense a form of crucifixion in which the liberated one has been so completely identified with Jesus, the Leader that he experiences in his liberation freedom from the powers of self. This is what Paul meant when he insisted that the believer's existence as the liberated one is eschatological exis-

tence. For to have died with Christ—as the believer has—means, “that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:6).” Or “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24).” Thus Paul confesses of himself: “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal. 6:14).” Paul describes gaining Christ and being found in him, as the state of being completely determined by the salvation-occurrence; for that is the force of the words: “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in death (Phil. 3:10).” The sufferings of Christ overflow Paul:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:7-11).

Liberated existence for Paul required crucifixion. He says, “I have been crucified with Christ.” The rent in Paul’s life, the inner schism which divorced the faculties of doing and willing, required a radical reorientation and restructuring of his life. Paul confessed that he could hear God speaking to him, recognized in his voice the declaration of his will, but when he acted, he failed to regulate his action by his assent. He declared, “I will, but I do not”—a weak will cannot carry out lofty intentions. Paul goes so far as to declare that an alien sovereign controlled his innermost being so that in spite of his good intentions he was a slave to the subrational forces arising out of the depth of his being. Paul cries out, “Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me out of this body doomed to death? God alone through Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God (Rom. 7:24-25a, NEB)!”

Paul’s liberation came through crucifixion—a liberation which involved stretching, nailing, and lifting! Paul is saying, I have been stretched! Stretched out of narrowness and selfishness and self-centeredness. I am a debtor to all men because their needs, burdens, and concerns have a claim on my life. I have been nailed to the cross and the cross represents my fundamental convictions about life. It represents the love, mind, power, holiness, and patience of God. I have been lifted so that I now participate in the benefits of Christ’s passion. I have been lifted into fellowship with Christ and

have become a partner with Christ in his suffering. Christ lives in me and "I" no longer live. The life I now live is not my life but the life which Christ lives in me. The followers of Jesus, the Leader must continue in the world the saving, restoring, reconciling, liberating ministry of Jesus.

The continuation of the ministry of Jesus, the Leader in the world requires a new type of existence—liberation existence. This kind of existence involves unconditional and absolute commitment to Jesus Christ and the utilization of the new spiritual dynamics that have been released to the world through him. Take upon oneself the cross of the ministry of Jesus, the Leader and complete that which is lacking—"This is my way of helping to complete, in my poor human flesh, the full tale of Christ's afflictions still to be endured." Here we are not only required to dedicate our mental powers in this ministry of liberation-existence but also our bodies. Our bodies may become the weapons of attack which may inevitably lead to martyrdom. Liberation-existence means absolute and total commitment to the causes for which Jesus, the Liberator lived and died—the prison-bound, the outcast, the poor, hungry, and persecuted peoples of the world—the exploited, the victims of war—men, women, and children who are pushed to the limits of their existence—the expendables—people for whom the world has made no provisions. Liberation-existence may require the rejection of the securities of the world—of personal comforts, of social acceptance, the destruction of some of our cherished values and honored institutions. It may require a new style of living in which the follower calls into question and seriously attacks the rules, traditions, customs, and mores of the society in which he lives. In doing this, the committed Christian may become a rebel, a political and social outcast, alienated from church, home, and family—a stranger in the land. Today we hear the words of Jesus again, "Are you able?" Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? May our answer be the words expressed in the words of the hymn writer.

Lord, we are able.

Our spirits are Thine.

Remold them, make us,

Like Thee, divine.

Thy guiding radiance

Above us shall be

A beacon to God,

To love and loyalty.<sup>3</sup>

—Earl Marlatt

## JESUS, THE DISTURBER

Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." . . . Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified." And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified."

—Matthew 27:19-23

Jesus, the Disturber confronts Jerusalem. This disturbing quality of Jesus is sometimes overlooked because we have been so concerned with depicting him as the giver of peace. Jesus did give to the world peace, but it was a peace which grew out of disturbing the world, out of confronting the world with the relentless demands of his revolutionary message.

Jesus disturbed the world by his birth. Who can forget the anxious inquiry of the wise men who asked, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him (Matt. 2:2)." Herod was disturbed by his birth: "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him (Matt. 2:3)." Yes, Jerusalem was disturbed by his birth. Jerusalem was disturbed again when Jesus, the Disturber entered that city on Palm Sunday. Here again we note: "And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?' " And again in our text this disturbing Jesus confronts Jerusalem in this last and most decisive encounter. Let us paraphrase Pilate's question: "What shall I do with this disturber, this rabble-rouser, this god-intoxicated, ghetto-bred lad of Nazareth?" The premonition of Pilate's wife is suggestive in that she sends words of advice to him: "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." This is the crisis of Jerusalem. This is the crisis of our world. The disturbing presence of Jesus will not give us rest. The crisis of Jerusalem and our world precipitated by Jesus, the Disturber brings to surface an awareness of a pathological condition, the presence of danger. And in the background hovers the dark possibility that everything

may go wrong. The crisis of Jerusalem and our world when confronted by Jesus, the Disturber ushers to the forefront God's inescapable judgment and grace.

Now to be sure, Jerusalem did not want this confrontation. The city did not want to accept him and crucifying him would be distasteful. If only the Disturber could be dodged and nothing done about him! Pilate must have asked over and over again why must he have anything to do with this Disturber of the peace.

*First, consider that there is a Pilate in every man, in that all of us instinctively attempt to sidestep, avoid, and evade difficult issues and disturbing personalities.* Fundamentally, we are all escapists seeking to lose ourselves in the land of neutrality. But we are shocked and irritated when we discover that life is not made for neutrals and that when we are confronted by Jesus, the Disturber, we are presented with two choices—either we are for him or we are against him. Jesus declares the impracticability of neutrality: "He that is not with me is against me. And he that is not against me is for me." With this statement, Jesus defeats the Pilates of every age who try to wash their hands of the disturbing reality which one finds in his presence.

In every realm of human life we are forced to make a decision. We must choose between altruism or self-centeredness, character or reputation, harnessed tempers or explosive anger, sexual gratification or the lack of it, sobriety or drunkenness, truth or falsehood, right or wrong, Jesus, the Disturber or the demons of our god-intoxicated civilization. We cannot escape. The basic decisions of life confront us and we are forced to make a choice. Jesus, the Disturber confronts us and the question haunts us, "What shall we do with Jesus who is called Christ?" In the international realm Jesus, the Disturber confronts the nations of the earth with an inescapable choice—either Christian brotherhood or political anarchy and death, either the peace of Jesus, the Disturber or the devil's hell. Every decision made by our nation is made in the presence of Jesus, the Disturber. The representatives of city councils, state representatives, and members of the Senate and House of Representatives are aware of his presence and they ask wistfully with Pilate, "What shall we do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

The confrontation of Jesus and Jerusalem has focused the mind on what this confrontation meant to him—that is, Jesus. But we must change our focus and see what this confrontation meant to Jerusalem. His presence split that city wide open. Listen to some of his severe denunciations on the city of Jerusalem, the religious establishment and the governmental officials. He called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" who "shut the kingdom of heaven against men (Matt 23:13)." He called them "blind guides," "blind

fools," "blind men." The character of the Pharisees is relentlessly assailed by Jesus with the words, "For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity (Matt. 23:25)." "For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness (Matt. 23:27)." "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell (Matt. 23:33)?"

Listen to the lament of Jesus, the Disturber, over Jerusalem as recorded in Matthew 23:37-39:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Yes, we repeat, do not pity Jesus but rather pity Jerusalem because Jesus is disturbing. We like to think of Jesus as beautiful and lovely and we give him glorious names but we must also remember that he came to cast fire on the earth; he came to shake men, to disturb them. There is something incendiary about Jesus, the Disturber in that he lights a fire wherever he goes. We are forever haunted by his ideals and we are made miserable in that we are forced to either accept him or reject him. In our despair we proclaim that life would have been easy if he had never been born because fundamentally our desire is the desire of Pilate's wife, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man." If you have never felt this way about Jesus, the Disturber you have never taken him seriously. We stand today in Pilate's shoes trying to escape him, to avoid him, to ignore him. But after two thousand years, Jesus, the Disturber, confronts us and we must decide either for him or against him.

*Second, in many realms there are personalities who continue the ministry of disturbance, of arousing divine discontent with the affairs of the world.* These are the great interpreters of the currents of history, and they incarnate in their own lives a certain quality which is due to their commitment to the ideals and principles for which Jesus lived and died. You see, Jesus was an individual who was totally obedient to God and he permitted God's will to be absolutely determinative for his whole life. He has become for us the Revealer, the Liberator, the Disturber, and the Reconciler. He believed in the moral order of God. He believed that the Golden Rule is the law of life in God's world. He believed that every soul has infinite value in the sight of God. He believed that goodwill and brotherhood are the preconditions of mankind's welfare in the



world. He believed that love is the greatest power in the universe. He loved the people with such an intensity and a compassion that men have equated his love with the love of God. He was a friend to the poor, the needy, the outcast. He championed the cause of the weak and oppressed. He confronted the power systems of his age with the relentless righteousness and wrath of God. He took upon himself the burdens and concerns of those who mourned, the persecuted, the exploited, the weak, the disinherited, and the "nobodies" of the world. This was the ministry of Jesus, the Disturber. He disturbed his world during his day with his ministry. Those who attempt to continue this ministry in the world will be marked men; yes, marked with the mark of death.

Whenever the common basic assumptions of a society are severely criticized and questioned disturbance is created. The ministry of Jesus, the Disturber was one which championed the cause of the disinherited, questioned in a most severe manner the basic assumptions of human relations during his time. Modern man only needs to be reminded that the work of science is carried on in this way—a relentless scrutiny, evaluating and questioning of the basic assumptions of human existence. The genius appears and asks for the basis of the accepted assumptions and whenever these assumptions are proven false, disturbance, disruption, and revolution arise out of the depth. Copernicus, Galileo, and Einstein caused disturbance in the scientific realm; Marx, Engels, and Lenin in the realm of government and social relations; Luther, Calvin, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the realm of religion. Today is a day of disturbance and revolution. The foundations are shaking in America and many reasons are given for this disturbance and shaking. James Baldwin wrote, "It is not a Negro revolution that is upsetting the country. What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity."<sup>1</sup> One of the functions of disturbers is to make men and nations see themselves as they really are, to become aware of their own identity, and to expose the hidden, corrupt forces of evil which determine and dominate that country's existence.

More profoundly, however, there has arisen in America black thinkers who have questioned the basic assumptions which have divided our country into two contrasting groups: one group is white, free, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, Catholic, rich, and powerful; the other group is predominately black, poor, oppressed, repressed, decitizenized, and exploited. These black thinkers have exposed the assumptions upon which our society is based and have revealed to all the inner corruption and decay which has almost penetrated every segment of this nation's life. Questioning the fundamental assumptions of American society, these black Americans have continued in the world the ministry of Jesus, the Disturber. Let us look at

some of their pronouncements and we will be made aware of how these black scholars have exposed the hidden assumptions that undergird American life as we know it.

Frederick Douglass reminded black Americans that the quest for freedom and equality would occasion disturbance, unrest, and confusion. He wrote:

Those who profess to favor freedom yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. Find out what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blow, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.<sup>2</sup>

W. E. B. DuBois continued in the world this disturbing ministry of Jesus when he called and urged black Americans to develop a new sense of their own worth and dignity:

We black folk may help, for we have within us a race new stirrings; stirrings of a new appreciation of Joy, of a new desire to create, of a new will to be, as though in this morning of group life we had awakened from some sleep that once dimly mourns the past and dreams a splendid future and there has come the conviction that the youth that is here today, the Negro Youth, is a different kind of Youth, because in some new way it bears this mighty prophecy on its breast, with a new realization of itself, with new determination for all mankind.<sup>3</sup>

Again, DuBois wrote in 1899:

I am a Smoke King.  
I am black  
I am darkening with song.  
I am harkening to wrong.  
I will be black as blackness can  
The blacker the mantle the mightier the man! <sup>4</sup>

Marcus Garvey reminded black Americans that if they would rise to true manhood they must avoid cowardice and fear. He declared:

We have allowed cowardice and fear to take possession of us for a long time, but that will never take us anywhere. It is no use being afraid of these nations and peoples. They are human beings like ourselves. We have blood, feelings, passions, and ambitions just as they have. Why, therefore, should we allow them to trample down our rights and de-

prive us of our liberty? Negroes everywhere must get that courage of manhood that will enable them to strike out, irrespective of who the enemy is, and demand those things that are ours by rights—moral, legal and divine.<sup>5</sup>

Let us listen to Brother Martin Luther King, Jr. as he speaks out against the war in Vietnam. And this disturbing statement which follows set in motion deep national currents of antagonism against him:

We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm X, possibly more than any black American since Emancipation, disturbed this nation. He is frank and brutal in his description of the cancer that is destroying America. He declares:

I am not a racist, and I do not subscribe to any of the tenets of racism. But the seed of racism has been firmly planted in the hearts of most American whites ever since the beginning of this country. This seed of racism has rooted itself so deeply in the subconsciousness of many American whites that they themselves oftentimes are not aware of its existence, but it can be easily detected in their thoughts, their words, and in their deeds.<sup>7</sup>

Malcolm X hurled his challenge to black Americans and reminded them of the one essential prerequisite which men must possess if they would be free: namely, to be a man! He declared: "Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything. If you are a man you take it. If you can't take it you don't deserve it."<sup>8</sup>

Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X were disturbers of the peace in that they confronted this nation with the true sense of its identity. They fought for the liberation of black Americans and took up the cause of the oppressed peoples of the world. They believed in freedom and equality, liberty and justice, and they wanted their black brothers to escape the bondage of second-class citizenship and be the recipients of the fruits and blessings of our American democracy. They believed in human dignity and racial identity for black Americans. They exposed the hidden chambers of hatred and preju-

dices in this nation's life. Their pronouncements caused to surface the deep-seated angers and violence which were hidden from common view. Their fate was in a measure the fate of Jesus, the Disturber. Brother DuBois was bitterly attacked by the power structure of this nation, and because of his ministry of liberation for black folk was called a "communist" and "harrassed" out of the country. Brother Marcus Carvey was sentenced by this nation to serve "time" in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia and died a broken man. Brother Martin Luther King, Jr. was felled by an assassin's bullet in Memphis. And Brother Malcolm X was murdered by black brothers who were used to silence his voice of protest and disturbance. Kill the dreamer but the dream lingers. Martyr the man but his ideals are immortal. These men are greater in death than they could have ever been in life because in a real sense they completed that which was lacking in the ministry of Jesus, the Disturber.

We are conscious that this picture of Jesus, the Disturber cuts across the nerve and is irritating. We would prefer to think about the beautiful Jesus, the attractive one, the bringer of peace, forgiveness, and concord. But there is another side to this man Jesus. We will remember him saying to us, "He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but, when it falls on any one, it will crush him (Matt. 21:44)." This is Jesus, the Disturber's law of gravitation. The truths which Jesus, the Disturber, has brought into the world are beautiful and noble. But when these truths are rejected they become like rocks which will crush both men and nations.

Jesus, the Disturber forces a decision about him, his ideals, and the causes for which he lived and died. Jesus, the Disturber is a terrifying reality and his presence and his words are forever in the hearts and minds of men and nations. We cannot avoid him. We cannot escape his presence. We cannot close our ears to the radical demands of his relentless love. We stand in his presence as Peter did and we cry with him: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:8)." Jesus is no beautiful landscape that is to be admired. He is no portrait on the walls of the cathedrals, nor a carved figure of one nailed to a cross. He refused to be frozen in the multicolored glass windows of our houses of worship. He is no hidden reality present in some mysterious way in the elements of the Lord's Supper. No! His presence is real and it is the reality of this presence which shakes and disturbs us. We cannot get away from him and we are forced to decide for him or against him.

For Peter, Jesus was the disturbing one but he was also his Liberator. For Nicodemus, Jesus confronted him with the impossible demands of the new birth and yet through him the new birth is a possibility. Jesus uncovered the dishonesty of Zacchaeus, disturbed

his whole life and yet led him into the pathways of integrity and honesty. Jesus exposed the erotic living of the woman at the well of Samaria and yet he changed her into an evangel of the gospel. Run across the pages of the New Testament and every man who has stood in his presence has been forced to make a decision about him—Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, Pilates, the mourners, the meek, the disinherited. We shun the ugliness which he reveals about us but yet the light of his presence reveals to us what we may become as children of God. It could be that Baldwin's statement ought to be amended to read, "That what is upsetting this country is not only the sense of its own identity but also the presence of Jesus, the Disturber." He is our peace. He is our true life. To reject him means chaos, destruction, and annihilation. To accept Jesus, the Disturber means peace, a peace which the world can neither give, receive, nor take away. Jesus, the Disturber is God's divine judgment on us. He is also God's grace which saves, liberates, reconciles, and empowers. "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" The choice is ours:

Once to every man and nation comes the  
moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the  
good or evil side;  
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering  
each the bloom or blight,  
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the  
sheep upon the right,  
And the choice goes by forever 'twist that  
darkness and that light.

—James Russell Lowell

## JESUS, THE EMANCIPATOR

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

—John 1:42

The concept of Jesus as Emancipator is deeply rooted in the history of black Americans. The Greek word behind the English word emancipation is rich in meaning. It may be translated, "ransom," "redemption," "deliverance," "freedom," "liberation," "emancipation." Possibly the most profound expression of black Americans' desire for freedom, liberation, and emancipation is to be found in the black spiritual "Go Down, Moses":

Go down, Moses  
'Way down in Egypt land,  
Tell ole Pharaoh,  
To let my people go.<sup>1</sup>

This early expression of faith in God by black Americans is presented with the idea that God is the Emancipator, the giver of freedom. Black Americans have believed that God's most decisive act of emancipation for them is to be found in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Emancipator.

More recently, black Americans' requests for liberation, freedom, and emancipation have been expressed in the songs of the civil rights movement. Let us listen to the words of two of these songs of freedom, liberation, and emancipation.

Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom,  
Oh Freedom over me, over me—  
And before I'll be a slave  
I'll be buried in my grave  
And go home to my Lord and be free.<sup>2</sup>

In the quest for freedom and emancipation black Americans were encouraged not to be moved or turned around. So they sang:

We are fighting for our freedom  
We shall not be moved;  
We are fighting for our freedom,  
We shall not be moved—

Just like a tree  
Planted by the water,  
We shall not be moved.<sup>3</sup>

The conviction that Jesus was somehow or another involved in the emancipation of black Americans is not to be denied. This is precisely what Jesus has meant and still means, and it is expressed in the declaration of the nature and purpose of his own ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to  
preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release  
to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are  
oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of  
the Lord.

—Luke 4:18-19

Whenever we think of Jesus as Emancipator we must not be overly occupied or concerned with his sacrifice on the cross. It is our conviction that the entire life of Jesus was emancipatory. He is the world's greatest emancipator, not so much because of what he did on the cross but rather because of what he did to men and women in his daily contacts with them. He gave to men the gift of freedom. He opened the eyes of men so that they could see. Possibly the greatest description of the emancipatory work of Jesus is given in his message to John who wanted to know if he was the true Emancipator:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me (Luke 7:22-23).

This brings us to our text for the morning, one which speaks of Simon's first encounter with Jesus. It gives us the characteristic attitude of Jesus, the Emancipator toward people. As the Emancipator of men he approached people from the point of view of what they might become. He was not concerned about what he could get out of people and certainly he would not misuse people or take them for granted. When the Emancipator encountered Simon he did not think of him as a pawn in a game that could be played, nor even as somebody who could be described, tabulated, and categorized. He sees Simon in terms of what he may become. Jesus, the Emancipator sees the hidden potentialities in this man and he



breathes into his life new hope and thereby becomes the creator, emancipator, and maker of a new man—the Rock Man.

Simon stands before Jesus, the Emancipator as a rough, disorganized patch of humanity. This scene calls to mind the story of Michelangelo who, when passing through a mason's yard where great blocks of marble stood stored, leaped upon one of them with hammer and chisel in hand and began to chip and cut and carve at the marble shouting, "I must let the angel out of it." Michelangelo saw an angel embedded in stone as it were and he possessed the skill and the art which if used on this stone could release the angel. So Jesus, the Emancipator looks upon Simon with his eye of divine grace and notes what can be made of him. He sees what Simon is but he is overwhelmed with what Simon may become.

*Let us consider, in the first place, how Jesus deals with the total personality of man in the emancipatory process.* Simon stood before Jesus as a particular and peculiar individual, a man who was noted for certain qualities and defects. Men knew his appearance, his voice, and his powers. He was Simon and no one else. Here we have the mystery and uniqueness of human personality. Every human individual is unique and each man has his separate and distinct personality. All men occupy their own niche in the world and they all have their own individuality which they must never betray. God wants us to be what we are and not a bad imitation of someone else. He does not wish that our characters be submerged in others stronger than our own. We were born originals and we should not die as mere copies of someone else. We should not become a pale reflection of some dominant group or some outstanding personality.

Black Americans are aware of the pressures and coercion which have been placed on them to deny their very being—their uniqueness as men, as children of God. Integration has meant, in too many instances, that black Americans must become white Americans. Attempts were made to mold black Americans into the image of the white man, thereby destroying their uniqueness, characteristics, and distinctiveness as a people. For black Americans to become white would really mean the annihilation of their very persons, something that God never intended for them to do. James Brown is right when he cries, "I've got to be me," and in this affirmation he sets forth one of the basic demands of Jesus, the Emancipator. God wants that particular individuality which he gave them.

The fact is Simon would remain Simon, the unique one with all of his potentialities, uniqueness, and characteristics even when he became Cephas—the Rock Man. The Emancipator could use that impulsive and eager nature of his. Simon would find it helpful in the dark hours which provoke despondency and in times of failure

and depression. His emancipated existence would require all of those qualities which were good in his life. Simon discovered that as he grew into the Rock Man it was his unique nature which Jesus was using and developing for his service. Let us remember that things which are most disturbing in our composition, which frighten and perplex us, can be preserved and used by Jesus, the Emancipator. What the Emancipator wishes us to be is ourselves, that which he designed us to be. Surely we will remember the story of Sir Christopher Wren who created the model for St. Paul's Cathedral. It is reported that he would weep when he looked at St. Paul's Cathedral because this cathedral as modified and altered by those who overruled his judgment was far inferior to the one which he had designed. If only we knew what we might have been! What God designed us to be! Whatever the condition of the raw material of our lives may be, Jesus, the Emancipator says to us: I will emancipate you. I will restore. I will help you to be yourself.

Simon not only stood before Jesus, the Emancipator as a unique personality but as a person with a history. He stood before Jesus, the Emancipator with fragments of home clinging to him for he was Simon, son of John. He stood before Jesus, the Emancipator as a product of historical events which had produced him, determined his existence, shaped his outlook, and developed his character. Simon was a product and part of a larger whole and to obliterate the history which had produced him, or to alter it, or to use it to destroy his own personality, or to use it to imprison him within the framework of his present existence as a "thing," would be a tragedy. Simon was aware of his history, proud of his home, grateful for his racial identity, and even boastful of the craft which he had mastered. All the historical forces which were embedded in him and which had produced him, Jesus, the Emancipator he could use to his own glory.

Black Americans, too, have a history—unique, glorious; a history which has shaped them and a history which they have shaped. Throughout the history of black Americans one will discover singular contributions to every field of human endeavor. Black Americans have produced a literature. They have created songs and produced music. They possess a uniqueness and a significance which can only be appreciated and understood in the light of the history which is theirs to own and to possess. Knowledge of this history is one of the means by which black Americans possess themselves. All their history, as it was with Simon, they bring to Jesus, the Emancipator. Black Americans bring to Jesus a tough faith, strong bodies which come from long nights of suffering. They bring to him their tears and sorrows, their triumphs and their victories, their unsullied enthusiasm, their songs and their dances. They bring to the Emancipa-

tor an unlimited capacity to love and a hope which refuses to die. Black Americans like Simon bring to the Emancipator all the forces which have provided them and made them what they are. They believe that Jesus, the Emancipator knows how to use them. They stand in his presence as Simon did and it is their prayer that they will emerge into Rock Men under the shaping hand of the Emancipator.

*Second, Simon recognized that the determinative factor for his own existence was Jesus, the Emancipator.* Simon's personality, his heredity, his history, the influences of his environment were all there in him. But it was Jesus, the Emancipator who took them up and showed Simon how to use them. What, you ask, was that which turned the scale and which compelled him to place all the treasures of his personality at the disposal of Jesus, the Emancipator? It was God's grace—a grace which took the form of a prophecy. It was a prophecy which contained a high calling, a sudden worth, and even fame if he would fulfill that prophecy by accepting Jesus as Emancipator. "Thou shalt be called Cephas (the Rock Man)." Simon found himself suddenly the possessor of an ideal of his life pronounced over him by Jesus, the Emancipator. He believed Jesus, the Emancipator. He trusted him. "Those who trust us, educate us" is a good saying and this is what Jesus did for Simon. He gave him an ideal, demanded that he believe in himself, that he was capable of attaining certain heights, of accomplishing certain goals, and of even turning Simon into a Rock Man. Only let us remember the dangers and even the difficulties of following out an ideal which we may believe to be out of our grasp. Black Americans have caught a glimpse of this ideal—to be themselves, to be free, to be proud of what they are, to embrace their history, and to recognize their own distinctiveness—identity. This is the ideal.

Solomon P. Gethers describes the black Americans' effort to free themselves from racial oppression and he avers that this stretches back over the entire period of the black Americans' stay in this country. He points out that there are four struggles in which black Americans have been involved in seeking freedom in this racist American society. First, there is the struggle for freedom from physical enslavement; second, the struggle for civil and political equality; third, the struggle for socioeconomic equality; and fourth, the struggle for ethnic selfhood.<sup>4</sup> In their struggles, black Americans have been aided and assisted by Jesus, the Emancipator. Though sometimes weak, baffled, halting, timid, discouraged, Jesus, the Emancipator demands that they press on. Jesus, the Emancipator who knows their passions, baffling heredity, paralyzing environment, has accepted these and called them and by the help of his grace and power they shall win.

Because of Thy strong faith, I kept the track  
Whose sharp-set stones my strength had well nigh spent;  
I could not meet Thy eyes if I turned back: So on I went.

Because Thou wouldst not yield belief in me,  
The threatening crags that rose my way to bar  
I conquered inch by crumbling inch—to the Goal afar.

And though I struggle toward it through hard years,  
Or flinch, or falter blindly, yet within,  
"You can," unwavering my spirit hears: And I shall win.<sup>5</sup>

Possibly the will and determination to win has been expressed movingly in one of the civil rights songs, "We Shall Overcome."

We shall overcome,  
We shall overcome,  
We shall overcome today  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
We shall overcome today.

The Lord will see us through,  
the Lord will see us through,  
The Lord will see us through today.  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
We shall overcome today.<sup>6</sup>

Black Americans are beginning to know who they are as Simon knew who he was. But Simon and black Americans know that Jesus, the Emancipator and Redeemer knows all of them through and through. The phrase which is translated "Jesus looked at him" denotes that penetrating glance which reaches to the very source of the individual. This look of Jesus, the Emancipator is no mere casual glance. It was a searching scrutiny. Jesus, the Emancipator says to him: You are Simon the son of John. You shall be Cephas, which means you shall be free—you shall be emancipated, you shall be liberated.

"You are" and "you shall be" present to us the contrast between what Simon was and what he would become under the emancipating touch of Jesus. No man can be an emancipator who has not a "shall be" for the person he seeks to liberate. Jesus is fitted to be the world's emancipator and liberator because he has a "shall be" for every man. The Emancipator takes us just as we are and he tells us of something better and nobler which we may become. Let us think of the "shall be" which Jesus, the Emancipator has uttered to others. He found a woman of Samaria in shame and disgrace and spoke to her a "shall be" of holiness and purity. He found the ruthless, cheating Levi at his tax desk and spoke to him a "shall be" of grace and apostleship. We see now how Jesus, the Emancipator's "shall be" met Simon's special need. The gift that Simon longed for

but despaired of getting was strength—power! That is just the gift Jesus, the Emancipator dares to give to him. You are Simon—weak, vacillating, powerless. You shall be called Peter—the Rock Man, the power man, the rugged and strong man! Still Jesus, the Emancipator speaks today the same glorious “shall be” to all men and especially to black Americans because he cherishes the same radiant and unconquerable hope for liberation and emancipation of all. The Emancipator’s hope is the hope that comes true. We can imagine that those who stood by and knew Simon’s reputation, his weakness and powerlessness probably turned away with a smile and perhaps a shrug of the shoulders. But the Emancipator’s promise came true. It was Emerson who said, “We are but dwarfs of ourselves.” Yes, but only dwarfs until we attain unto the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the stature of the fullness of Christ. Such are the possibilities that Jesus, the Emancipator sees in all of us.

*Some final questions must be asked. How is this “shall be” of Simon realized? How is he transformed into the Rock Man—a man of power? What makes man man?* There are those who say that man is man by virtue of his being made in the image of God. Image of God is interpreted to mean some physical, mental, or intellectual quality which man has in common with God, that is, speech, mind, intelligence, and freedom. There are others who say that the image of God refers to man’s relationship with God. We believe that the image of God means more than this.

Let us see how Simon discovered himself and what the image of God meant to him. To his amazement he discovered that participation in the ministry of liberation—the ministry of Jesus—enabled him, Simon, to fulfill Jesus’ prophecy of “shall be.” What a glorious ministry this was and still is. Simon remembered the invitation of Jesus, the Emancipator to participate in this ministry. He was with Jesus when he announced the “at handness” of the kingdom of God. He discovered firsthand that the kingdom of God was not some vague idea of a moral disposition in the hearts of men, but rather a decisive intervention of the living God in the affairs of men and on the stage of history. God through Jesus, the Liberator is acting in history to visit, redeem, liberate, and emancipate his people. The kingdom of God was and is God’s divine act. It is the reign of God becoming effective in the world of human experience. The reign of God is God in action through Jesus, God in conflict with the powers of oppression and evil. The reign of God is the divine crisis of the affairs of men. Simon participated in this ministry of liberation and his participation made possible Jesus’ “shall be.”

The mighty works and deeds which Jesus performed in the pres-

ence of Simon were signs that a new power had invaded history and were tokens of God's liberating acts in him. The miracles are the kingdom of God in action, God's sovereign grace, forgiveness, and liberation which were operative in Jesus. Simon knew what forgiveness was because he had been forgiven. He knew what liberation was because he had been set free. He had been forgiven to serve. He had been liberated to be bound to his fellowmen. The miracles were the mighty works of Jesus, the Liberator in which and through which he identified himself with the oppressed peoples of the world and became their savior. Simon was made to realize that when one is liberated he is not cut off from the sufferings and sorrows of this world. He becomes "in their affliction, afflicted," and he bears freely the sorrows, the heartaches, and the misery of his fellowmen. Simon became conscious that Jesus' ministry of liberation was not confined to the "elect" but rather with the whole suffering humanity: the outcast, imprisoned, hungry, sick, and oppressed.

Jesus is not only the Liberator for the church but for the whole world. He is not merely identified with humanity at large, but with every single man in his utter individuality. Jesus made Simon realize that it was *this man, this child, this victim of oppression* to whom he would offer the ministry of liberation. When he did this he was in reality encountering the Savior of the world. Simon discovered that as he served he became conscious of who he was and what he could become as he ministered to the poor wretches of the earth. He found out that all those who were oppressed, who had fallen among thieves, who had been stripped and left half dead were representatives of Jesus, the Liberator and what he did and what he could become as he ministered to the poor wretches of the membered Jesus, the Liberator's words at the Great Judgment, words which were plowed into his very being;

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Matt. 25:34-40)."

What a description of the ministry of liberation! A man possesses the image of God in proportion as he participates and continues in the world this ministry of liberation.

The image of God is being-in-the-world-of-oppression and bringing to that world the ministry of liberation. The "shall be" of Jesus, the Emancipator which makes possible the image of God in man is the priceless gift which he offers to all men—to become a "rock man," a man of power which involves duplicating in one's own life Jesus' ministry of liberation.



# 10

## JESUS, THE LIBERATOR

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-24 Paul speaks of the doctrine of the cross. To some this doctrine is sheer folly; to others, it is the power of God. Some think the doctrine of the cross is weakness, but to the believers it is a revelation of the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the love of God. Jesus Christ is the subject of the Gospel. Paul writes:

This doctrine of the cross is sheer folly to those on their way to ruin, but to us who are on the way to salvation it is the power of God. Scripture says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the cleverness of the clever." Where is your wise man now, your man of learning, or your subtle debater—limited, all of them, to this passing age? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom, and he chose to save those who have faith by the folly of the Gospel. Jews call for miracles, Greeks look for wisdom; but we proclaim Christ—yes, Christ nailed to the cross; and though this is a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Greeks, yet to those who have heard his call, Jews and Greeks alike, he is the power of God and wisdom of God (NEB).

Jesus, the Liberator, is the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the love of God. Paul knew firsthand of the operation of these qualities: wisdom, power, and love. He could never quite understand this new wisdom, this new power, and this new love which he had experienced in Jesus, the Liberator. It was a queer kind of wisdom and love that had chosen him, one who had been a persecutor of the church and now summoned to be a messenger of the crucified-risen Lord. He could never comprehend this kind of love that had permitted Jesus, God's only son, to die on the cross for the salvation of men. Paul is astonished and amazed at this new revelation of love: "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8)."

Paul's new life had been determined by this encounter with Jesus, the Liberator. This new life which was God-given was the life of grace, and he shouts, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." The experience of this wisdom, power, and love, Paul defines as "the power of God unto salvation." It was a new kind of power, a power that had granted him freedom to life, righteousness, peace, and joy, and also freedom from sin, from the law, and from death. The liberating power of Jesus had emancipated him and set him free. He exhorts his fellow Christians: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1)."

Jesus, the Liberator, had given to Paul not only freedom but also a new self-understanding. This new self-understanding, according to Bultmann, is bestowed with faith and it is freedom through which the believer gains life and thereby his own self.<sup>1</sup> Paul discovered that he who belongs to Jesus, the Liberator, and thus to God has become master of everything. He declares to the Christians at Corinth that this grace-freedom event which they had experienced in Jesus, the Liberator, placed the whole world at their disposal: "So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3:21-23)."

Jesus is the Liberator. He is the revelation of the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. This was the message which the early Christian preachers were commissioned to proclaim. This message was called the kerygma. We preach Christ, Paul shouts. At the heart of the kerygma lies this fundamental christological affirmation: Jesus is the Liberator! Jesus is the emancipator!

Nineteen hundred years have passed since these stirring words were written by Paul and various interpretations of Jesus, the Liberator, have been presented. These interpretations range all the way from Jesus as the Son of God, of Paul, the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, John, and Hebrews to the Jesus of Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and Kierkegaard.

The tragedy of the interpretations of Jesus by the white American theologians during the last three hundred years is that Jesus has been too often identified with the oppressive structures and forces of the prevailing society. His teachings have been used to justify wars, exploitation of the poor and oppressed peoples of the world. In his name the most vicious form of racism has been condoned and advocated. In a more tragic sense this Jesus of the white church establishment has been white, straight-haired, blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon; that is, presented in the image of the oppressor. This "whiteness" has prevailed to the extent that the black, brown, or red peoples of

the world, who had accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, were denied full Christian fellowship in his church and were not accepted as brothers for whom Jesus died.

I have been asked to address myself to the theme, "The Christian Faith in a Revolutionary Age" and to indicate the techniques by which this faith may be communicated. You should expect that we would first critically evaluate the existing understanding of the Christian faith as interpreted and presented by white theologians and as a black American reveal to you the thinking concerning this interpretation of the Christian faith in the black community. We begin with the premise that white theology is severely limited in its interpretation of the Christian faith insofar as the nonwhite peoples of the world are concerned. This limitation is one of the causes for the quest for a black Messiah.

## THE LIMITATIONS OF WHITE THEOLOGY

To be sure, during the past fifteen years we have entered, insofar as the black community is concerned, into one of the most exciting periods in the life of the black people of this country. For more than one hundred years black students have studied in predominantly white seminaries and have been served a theological diet, created, mixed, and dosed out by white theological technicians. The black seminarians took both the theological milk and meat and even when they had consumed these, their souls were still empty. Those of us who went through the white seminaries did not understand why then. We had passed the courses in the four major fields of studies; we knew our Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr. We had entered deeply into a serious study of Bonhoeffer and Tillich, but we discovered that these white theologians had described the substance and had elucidated a contemporary faith for the white man. These white scholars knew nothing about the black experience, and to many of them this black experience was illegitimate and inauthentic.

The black man's religious style was considered subhuman by many of the white theological seminaries of this nation and the emotional nature of his religious experience was termed primitive. For the black seminary student to become a great preacher really meant that he had to *whitenize* himself. He had to suppress his naturalness and remake himself in the image of a Sockman, Fosdick, or Buttrick. You see, insofar as the white seminaries were concerned there were no great black preachers, and if a black preacher was fortunate to be called great by the white community, it meant that he was merely a pale reflection of the white ideal.

The young black seminary student today has been introduced into a whole new experience—one fashioned by the late Martin Luther King, Jr. but clarified and profoundly interpreted by Frantz

Fannon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Ron Karenga. The young black seminary student today has been tried by every conceivable ordeal that sadistic racial minds can devise; from the fire hoses to vicious dogs, from tear gas to electric animal prods. They have matched wits with the white racist of the power structure and are helping to pull down the system of segregation and discrimination. They have no objection to the combination of such words as "black and power," "black and theology," "black and church," "black and Christ," "black and God." They believe DuBois who wrote, "This assumption that of all the hues of God, whiteness is inherently and obviously better than brownness or tan leads to curious acts." They are not shocked nor are they discouraged if the term Black Power seems to offend or frighten white or black Americans. To these young Blacks, Black Power means consciousness and solidarity. It means the amassing by black people of the economic, political, and judicial control necessary to define their own goals and share in the decisions that determine their faith. Fannon, Malcolm, Carmichael, and Karenga forced the black seminary students to ask these questions: What do these white American and European theologians of a white racist-dominated religious establishment know about the soul of black folks? What do Barth, Brunner, and Tillich know about the realities of the black ghettos or the fate of black sharecroppers' families whose souls are crushed by the powerful forces of a society that considers everything black as evil? Could these white theologians see the image of the crucified Jesus in the mutilated face of a rat-bitten child, or a drug addict bleeding to death in a stinking alley?

We have learned that the interpretation of Christian theology and of Jesus expounded by white American theologians is severely limited. This is due to the simple reason that these white scholars have never been lowered into the murky depth of the black experience of reality. They never conceived the black Jesus walking the dark streets of the ghettos of the North and the sharecropper's farm in the Deep South without a job, busted, and emasculated. These white theologians could never hear the voice of Jesus speaking in the dialect of Blacks from the southern farms, or in the idiom of the Blacks of the ghetto. This severe limitation of the white theologians' inability to articulate the full meaning of the Christian faith has given rise to the development of black theology.

The Commission on Theology of the National Committee of Black Churchmen has issued a statement on black theology. In this document black theology is defined:

For us, Black theology is the theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's rev-

elation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says "No" to the encroachment of white oppression.<sup>2</sup>

The black scholars are indebted in a measure to white theologians. We have learned much from them. However, the white theologians in their interpretation of the Christian faith have ignored the black Christian experience. Many have felt that this black Christian experience was devoid of meaning and therefore could be omitted in their exposition and interpretation of the Christian faith. To be sure, this was a grievous error. The omission of the black Christian experience by white interpreters of the Christian faith meant that the message of the Christian faith thus interpreted was oriented toward the white community. Therefore this message had nothing significant to say to the black man who is now struggling for identity and dignity. The black theologians were forced to look at the black Christian experience and interpret this experience so as to ascertain what the black Christian experience has to say to the black man concerning the vital matters of the Christian faith. Black theology is a product of black Christian experience and reflection. It comes out of the past. It is strong in the present and we believe it is redemptive for the future.

## **THE QUEST FOR THE BLACK JESUS**

The reason for the quest for the black Jesus is deeply embedded in the black man's experience in this country. The black man's introduction to the white Jesus was a catastrophe! Vincent Harding reminds us that the Blacks encountered the American white Christ first on the slave ships that brought them to these shores. Blacks on the slave ship heard his name sung in hymns of praise while they died chained in stinky holes beneath the decks, locked in terror and disease. When the Blacks leaped from the decks of the slave ships they saw his name carved on the side of the ship. When the black women were raped in the cabins by white racists, they must have noticed the Holy Bible on the shelves. Vincent Harding declares, "The horrors continued on American soil. So all through the nation's history many black men have rejected this Christ—indeed the miracle is that so many accepted him. In past times our disdain often had to be stifled and sullen, our angers silent and self destructive. But now we speak out."<sup>3</sup>

One white perceptive theologian, Kyle Haselden, has observed:

The white man cleaves Christian piety into two parts: the strong, virile virtues he applies exclusively to himself; the apparently weak, passive virtues he endorses especially for the Negro. "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely" belong to the white man; "whatsoever things are of good report" belong to the Negro. The white man takes the active and positive Christian adjectives for himself: noble, manly, wise, strong, courageous; he recommends the passive and negative Christian adjectives to the Negro: patient, long-suffering, humble, self-effacing, considerate, submissive, childlike, meek.<sup>4</sup>

White theology has not presented us with good theological reasons why we should not speak out against this gross perversion of the Christian faith. White theology has not been able to reshape the life of the white church so as to cleanse it of its racism and to liberate it from the iron claws of the white racist establishment of this nation. White theology has presented the Blacks a religion of contentment in the state of life in which they find themselves. Such an interpretation of the Christian faith avoided questions about personal dignity, collective power, freedom, equality, and self-determination. The white church establishment presented to the black people a religion carefully tailored to fit the purposes of the white oppressors, corrupted in language, interpretation, and application by the conscious and unconscious racism of white Christians from the first plantation missionary down to Billy Graham.

The white Christ of the white church establishment is the enemy of the black man. The teachings of this white Christ are used to justify wars, exploitation, segregation, discrimination, prejudice, and racism. This white Christ is the oppressor of the black man and the black preacher and scholar were compelled to discover a Christ in his image of blackness. He was forced to look at the teachings of Jesus in the light of his own black experience and discover what this black Jesus said about the realities of his own life. The black preacher, seminary student, and scholar had their work cut out for them. If Bultmann's task was to demythologize the New Testament, the black preacher and scholar had to detheologize his mind of the racist ideas which had crept into interpretations of Jesus and to see him in the depth of his full humanity.

We remind you, we were asked to address ourselves "in the general area of understanding and communicating the Christian faith into today's revolutionary society." The first requirement is one of admitting the inadequacies of an understanding of the Christian faith which is used to support our contemporary racist society. Black and white scholars must read again the scriptures with new

eyes and minds so as to hear the words of Jesus in their disturbing clarity.

The subject of all preaching is Jesus Christ. As Paul says, "We proclaim Christ—yes, Christ nailed to the cross; and though this is a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Greeks, yet to those who have heard his call, Jews and Greeks alike, he is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

## **A RECOVERY OF THE HUMANITY OF JESUS**

Detheologizing demands that we recover the humanity of Jesus in all of its depth, length, breadth, and height. Jesus was born in a barn, wrapped in a blanket used for sick cattle, and placed in a stall. He died on a city dump outside Jerusalem.

The New Testament presents with disturbing clarity its record of the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus. There is no attempt to hide the stark realities which confronted Jesus from the barn of Bethlehem to the city dump of Jerusalem. The realism is naked and stark. Jesus was born in a barn. He died on a city dump. Even the place of the birth of Jesus is identified with the needs and the conditions of people. Where the need is the deepest, the situation most desperate, and the pain the sharpest, that is precisely where Jesus is. We repeat, even in the birth of Jesus, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke identify him with the needs, the suffering, the pain, and the anxieties of the world. You see, most of the world's babies are not born in the palaces of kings or the government houses of prime ministers, or the manses of bishops. Most of the world's babies are born in the ghettos of corrupt cities, in mud houses, in disintegrated cottages with cracked floors and stuffed walls where the muffled cries of unattended mothers mingle with the screams of newborn infants.

Bultmann writes about the offense of the incarnation of the word.<sup>5</sup> He contends that the revealer appears not as man in general; that is, not simply as a barrier of human nature but as a definite human being in history—Jesus of Nazareth—a Jew. The humanity of Jesus is genuine humanity. The writer of the Gospel of John has no theory about the preexistent miraculous entrance into the world or of the legend of the virgin birth. You know this legend or myth is presented to us in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The writer of the Gospel of Mark, the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel, and Paul teach a high Christology without reference to the virgin birth.

Permit us to make this suggestion: Suppose we would omit the phrase "of the Holy Spirit" from Matthew 1:18 where it is recorded that "Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child," what would this teach us

about the humanity of Jesus? The reaction of many would be instantaneous and we would be accused of teaching "a doctrine of the illegitimate birth of Jesus." These objectors would insist that the birth of Jesus was due to a special act of God in and through humanity and that since Jesus is who he is and has done what he has done, this requires that his entrance into the world through humanity must be unique. Those who advocate this position forget the teachings of Jesus in particular and the New Testament writers in general concerning all life. Jesus taught that all life comes from God and that the birth of every child embodies and expresses a unique act of God.

Who Jesus was, was determined not necessarily by the manner of his birth but rather by what he did. John Knox states that the first form of the christological question was, "What has God done through Jesus?"<sup>6</sup> The New Testament writers go to great length in presenting and discussing the saving deed of God through Jesus.

It was the belief of most writers of the New Testament that God was at work in the life and deeds of Jesus and that what God was doing in Jesus had both soteriological and eschatological significance. The conviction shared by most New Testament writers was to the effect that the last days had finally dawned and that God was acting decisively for man's salvation, renewal, and liberation. Again John Knox notes that the supreme importance of Jesus was determined more by his role and function than by his nature and further, "the christological question, which was originally a question about the eschatological and soteriological significance of an event, has become a question about the metaphysical nature of a person."<sup>7</sup> What must be done, therefore, if we are to understand the meaning and significance of Jesus, the Liberator, is to go behind the metaphysical speculation concerning him and ascertain and study those events which were foundational and believed by writers of the New Testament to possess saving and liberating significance. Men knew Jesus in terms of what he had done for them. J. K. Mozley states, "There is in the New Testament no speculative Christology divorced from the gospel of the Savior and the salvation he brings."<sup>8</sup> The early Christians were not seeking abstract definitions concerning the person of Jesus. The language of the early Christians was experimental, functional, and confessional. The foundation for the theology of Paul is the experience of what God had done for him in his own conversion, and he is basically interested in Jesus as the Redeemer, Revealer, and Liberator.

Brunner has argued that the titles given to Jesus in the New Testament are verbal in nature and character. They all describe an event, a work of God, or what God has done through Jesus in and



for mankind. Further, Brunner writes, "Who and what Jesus is can only be stated at first at any rate by what God does and gives in him."<sup>9</sup>

Brunner insists that all christological titles must be understood not in terms of their substantive implications but in terms of their verbal functions. The term *Christos* may be interpreted as the one in whom and through whom God is to establish his sovereignty. The title *Son of God* is functional and it suggests an office and the work of the Liberator rather than a description of his metaphysical nature. Even the title *Immanuel* is defined in terms of its functional implications because this title means "God is with us." The title *Kyrios* describes the one who rules over the church. And finally, the title *Savior* points to the one who is to bring the healing, salvation, and liberation for which mankind yearns.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of Jesus for religious living is determined by what Jesus has done for mankind and all the christological titles applied to Jesus emphasize his gift of liberation to and for men.<sup>11</sup>

The divinity of Jesus is a divinity of service. His humanity was stretched in service so as to include the whole world of man in its miseries, slavery, frustration, and hopelessness. The New Testament word used to express this deep concern for men is *splagchnizesthai*. This word means to be moved with compassion, and it is used to describe an emotion which moved Jesus, the Liberator, at the very depth of his being. This word also indicates the depth of Jesus' concern and identification with others. Whenever the Gospel writers used this word *splagchnizesthai* in reference to Jesus, they were attempting to describe the manner and the way in which Jesus identified himself completely with others and how he entered into the world of their misery and suffering, their slavery and hopelessness and provided the means for liberation and renewal.

The men and women of the New Testament period who witness this ministry of service, love, and liberation reach the astounding conclusion that Jesus is the Revelation of a new kind of freedom and has made available to men the liberating power of God's love. Jesus is God acting in the service of men, thereby enabling them to realize their God-given potentials as human beings and as sons of God.

The Christians of the first century saw in Jesus, the Liberator, the answer to their most distressing problems. Jesus in his ministry, identifies himself with all men. The early Christians believed that he provided the answer to their most disturbing problems and whatever their needs he was sufficient. The writers of the Four Gospels interpreted Jesus in the light of what they considered to be the greatest need of mankind. For the writer of the Gospel of Matthew,

Jesus is the new Rabbi; for Luke, he is the great Physician; for Mark, he is the Stranger satisfying the deepest needs of men; and for John, Jesus is the Revealer.

The people of all races, because of his service, are able to identify with him and to see in his humanity, a reflection of their own images. Today the black man looks at Jesus—observes his ministry of love and liberation and considers him the black Messiah who fights oppression and sets the captive free.

## COMMITTED TO THE MESSAGE AND MISSION OF JESUS

The radicalness of the humanity of Jesus is not only expressed in his service but also in his speech. We must permit his speech to address, probe, disturb, and challenge us. Prof. Ernst Fuchs has called the rise of the gospel a speech event—an opening of a new dimension of man's awareness, a new breakthrough in language and symbolization. Professor Fuchs writes: "The early Church is itself a language phenomenon. It is precisely for this reason that it has created for itself a memorial in the new stylistic form of the Gospel. Even the Apocalypse of John, and more than ever the apostolic epistles, are creations of a new language that transforms everything with which it comes into contact."<sup>12</sup>

The words of Jesus have the rugged fiber of a cypress tree and the jagged edge of a crosscut saw. His language is extreme, extravagant, explosive as hand grenades which are tossed into the crowds that listened to him. A tremendous vigor and vitality surges through his words. In Jesus' words, "a man with a log in his eye tries to pick a cinder out of his brother's eye." In the words of Jesus, "a giant hand hangs a millstone around the neck of one who exploits a little child and hurls the sinner into the midst of the sea." In the words of Jesus, "a man asks for bread and is given a stone, another asks for fish and is given a snake." In the words of Jesus, "men strain at the little gnats and gulp down the camels." In the words of Jesus, "a mountain develops feet and casts itself into the sea." He attacks the religious establishment of his day—the religious leaders, the ordained ministers with such phrases as "you hypocrites," "you blind guides," "you blind Pharisees," "you brood of snakes," "you serpents," "you murderers."

*Jesus spoke with authority and with power!*

In the city of Nazareth where he was reared, this dark, long-haired, bearded ghetto lad took over the synagogue service and read his universal manifesto of liberation:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me;

he has sent me to announce good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for  
the blind;  
to let the broken victims go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

—Luke 4:18-19, NEB

The reading of this liberation manifesto caused debates, rebuttals, accusations, counterrebuttals, wrath, anger, and hate. The Gospel of Luke is explicit in describing the reaction of the religious establishment to the manifesto of liberation of Jesus. "When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away (Luke 4:28-30)."

Liberation was the aim and the goal of the life of Jesus in the world. Liberation expresses the essential thrust of his ministry. The stage of his ministry was the streets. His congregation consisted of those who were written-off by the established church and the state. He ministered to those who needed him, "the nobodies of the world," the sick, the blind, the lame, and the demon-possessed. He invaded the chambers of sickness and death and hallowed these with the healing words of health and life. He invaded the minds of the demon-possessed and in those dark chambers of night he brought light, sanity, and order. Jesus ministered to men in their sorrow, sin, and degradation and offered them hope and light and courage and strength. He offered comfort to the poor who did not fit into the structure of the world. Jesus comforted the mourner and offered hope to the humble. He had a message for the men and women who had been pushed to the limits of human existence and on these he pronounced his blessing.

The people who received help from Jesus are throughout the Gospels on the fringe of society—men who because of fate, guilt, and prejudices were considered marked men; *sick people*, who had to bear their disease as punishment for crime or for some sin committed; *demoniacs*, that is those possessed of demons; *the lepers*, the first born of death to whom fellowship was denied; *gentiles*, women, and children who did not count for anything in the community; and *the really bad people*, the prostitutes, the thieves, the murderers, the robbers. When Jesus was pressed for an explanation of the radicalness of the thrust of his ministry, his answer was simple and direct. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Luke 5:31-32)."

The greatness of Jesus is to be found precisely in the way in

which he makes himself accessible to those who need him, ignoring conventional limitations and issuing that grand and glorious welcome—"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

The Gospel of Mark records the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Please listen to this passage. "And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her (Mark 1:29-30)." Now, verse 31 tells us what Jesus did: "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she served them."

Jesus is saying to his disciples the only way to lift is to touch. You cannot lift men without touching them. Jesus is saying to the church—the people of God—the church must not be locked in its stained-glass fortress with its multicolored windows, red-cushioned seats, crimson carpets, and temperature-controlled auditorium where according to Kierkegaard, "An anemic preacher preaches anemic gospel about an anemic Christ to an anemic congregation."<sup>13</sup>

The church building must be a point of departure, a departure into the world, into the dirty here and now.

We are challenged to continue in our world Jesus' ministry of love and liberation. We must recognize that to be a Christian is to be contemporaneous with Jesus, the Liberator. To be sure, to be a Christian is not to hold views about Jesus but rather to become a contemporary with Jesus in his ministry of suffering and humiliation and of love and liberation. To be a Christian is to be committed to the man Jesus in spite of the world's rejection of him, in spite of Christendom's betrayal of him, and in spite of the social and intellectual stigma involved in accepting and following him. To be a Christian is to stand with Jesus and participate in his ministry of love and liberation at the crossways of the world where men are crucified on the crosses of poverty, racism, war, and exploitation. To be a Christian is to try again to introduce Christianity into Christendom and to set free again the powers of the love and liberating ministry of Jesus, the Liberator.

# 11 JESUS, THE WORD OF LIFE

Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

—John 6:67-69

The person of Jesus Christ and his presence in the world throws the world into a state of confusion and unrest. He causes the world to look at itself, to examine its motives, to evaluate its system of value, and to criticize its goals. The words of Jesus search and explore the dark depth of the minds of men and reveal men in their true light. His words sift men, cause panic, restlessness, and confusion. Jesus Christ creates a sunderance because he cuts across the cherished values of the establishments of the world, the institutions of the world, and even his own church.

This is the situation of our text which reflects the pathos of his disciples and the abiding interest and love of Jesus. Jesus began his ministry in Judea and even though he had attained a degree of "success," he was aware that the crowds who followed him misunderstood or willfully ignored his purpose. Some men thought of him as a maker of bread, the master politician, the metropolitan physician, and the militant radical. He leaves Judea and goes to Galilee and here surface impressions of him are reflected in the attitudes of the crowds toward him. The crowds followed him to be healed or to be fed; others wanted to make him a king and force him into conflict with the established authorities. His real purpose in the world and the nature of his mission were not grasped by the crowd: Jesus finds it necessary to sift the crowds who follow him and he does this by insisting that he is among them to give to the world the real bread that endures; to confront man with the radical demands of God and the ultimate necessity to appropriate his own life.

The crowds now look upon him as an impractical dreamer and profess that they cannot understand him. But they understand him

to the extent that they realize that he will not be manipulated so as to be used to serve their own purposes. Many turn away from him disappointed and no longer walk with him and he is left with the twelve. Then he turns to his disciples—the twelve—wearily and wistfully asking, “Will you also go away? Will the tides of popular opinion and misunderstanding of who I am and what I have brought into the world make you go under?” Simon Peter answers him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” “You,” says Simon Peter, “have drawn us to yourself and supplied a deep need and satisfied a great craving which no one else was able to satisfy. Is there any other teacher that can rival you? Can we look for another while we still have you? We have believed and even know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

This answer of Simon Peter contains a great assumption, namely, that man must have someone to whom he may go. The souls of men are hungry, crushed, baffled, and perplexed, and cry out not for something but for someone. Men cannot live without a master, without a guide, without a revealer, a liberator, and a reconciler. Man is so constituted that he cannot live alone, cannot grope his own way except searching for the one who shall be his rest. It was Augustine who cried out, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find that rest which is in Thee.”

*First, if we are to discover who Jesus Christ is, we must proclaim, as Peter did, that “We have believed, and come to know that (he) is the Holy One of God.”* This was Peter’s confession. In spite of the false ideas about Jesus, the misunderstanding of his true mission, the use of his name to support causes which he never espoused or embraced, Peter knew who Jesus really was—the Holy One of God. Jesus was no magician, maker of bread, radical militant, racial bigot, master politician, metropolitan physician! In spite of the erroneous impressions which had surfaced concerning him Peter was forced to discover Jesus for himself—the Holy One of God!

This same task of discovering Jesus anew, of disassociating him from causes and movements which he abhorred is an inescapable demand which is placed on the minds and hearts of believers today. To be sure, we know what the enemies of Jesus called him—“the impractical dreamer,” “the twisted-minded idealist,” “the unrealistic idealist,” “the warped-minded Jew!” These impressions of Jesus are clear and can be easily repudiated. It is not so much what the enemies of Jesus have done and said about him but rather what his friends have done to him. Moreover, it is what the so-called followers of Jesus—what the alleged believers and so-called Christians have done to him. The Christian church in many instances has

used the name of Jesus as a rallying cry for causes which he would never have supported or advocated. It has used Jesus and his name to sponsor and support the most hideous social movements. Jesus has been used to support slavery, discrimination, segregation, racial prejudice, and every conceivable form of social injustice. His name has been used to support capitalism, socialism, and even fascism. Theologians have placed on him metaphysical concepts which he would have repudiated and have stashed him away in some theological mystical heaven separated from the needs of the oppressed peoples of the world. The artists and sculptors have frozen him in stone or in the glass windows of some deserted cathedral.

Jesus Christ has been made by many Christians to sponsor social causes which he never would have sponsored. Christians have put on Jesus Christ a military uniform, placed his cross on their war flags and used his name with their battle cries. They have used his name to bless the slaughters and human misery of the Vietnams of the world. In his name Christians have attempted to silence the cries of the oppressed peoples of the world. If you think Calvary which was the handiwork of his enemies to be the vilest thing that has ever been done to Jesus Christ, then you are mistaken. The crucifixion of Jesus by many Christians today is far more hideous than was his crucifixion nineteen hundred years ago! The real Jesus—the Holy One of God, the Oppressed One who took upon himself the needs of men, the Liberator who challenged the bigotry of the religious leaders of his day, refused to bow when confronted with the power of Rome, and died triumphantly and courageously on Calvary—has been ignored. The need is imperative. Christendom must discover anew who Jesus, the Holy One of God was and is.

We repeat: the believer today must discover Jesus Christ anew so that he may truly confess, "We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." The order of words, believe and know, is interesting. Possibly there is a knowledge which precedes belief but the fullest knowledge follows belief. To believe is not only sight's perception, but it is also faith's vision. Faith, or to believe, confers on the individual insights and an understanding about who God is and what he is doing in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Liberator. Therefore, to believe or to have faith, is to know God and to see the revelation of his working in the life and ministry of the historical Jesus. Eternal life is faith's vision: it is faith's perception of God, a form of knowledge about God. Those who profess this faith know that God can be found in the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth who remains forever as an object of saving knowledge, the source of life and truth.

Possibly black Americans possess this unique gift of faith. The dark past has taught them and the stony roads over which they

have traveled has prepared this people to discern and to understand who Jesus really is—the Liberator, the Oppressed One of God.

Frederick Douglass declared:

The allotments of Providence seem to make the black man of America the open book out of which the American people are to learn lessons of wisdom, power, and goodness—more sublime and glorious than any yet attained by the nations of the old or the new world. Over the bleeding back of the American bondman we shall learn mercy. In the very extreme difference of color and features of the Negro and the Anglo Saxon, shall be learned the highest ideas of the sacredness of man and the fullness and perfection of human brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

So, in spite of what Christendom has done to Jesus, in spite of the many subtle ways in which he has been hidden from the view of the common man and the oppressed people of the world, in spite of the fact that Jesus has been identified with the oppressor and his name used to justify war, racism, repression, and oppression, black Americans know who he is—the Holy One of God, the Oppressed One, the Liberator who sets the captive free, the Reconciler who is striving to create a world in which all men may live together in peace and love!

*Second, we are driven because of our wants and needs to Jesus, the Holy One of God, the Liberator.* We all need someone to whom we may go. In spite of the many leaders who may claim our allegiance, it is the conviction of all these who have come to know the Man that only he can satisfy the deepest needs of our nature. It is not a question of choice between Jesus, the Liberator and “something” else, but between Jesus and “someone” else. Man, if he has religion, must have one in which a personality is enshrined in the very heart of it. You see the question is not, “What shall we take up if we leave Jesus,” or “What system shall we believe in,” “What philosophy shall we embrace,” or “What theories are we to hold”? We are asking rather, “To whom shall we go?” There is a difference between believing in abstract things and persons. Men may believe in ten thousand things or they may believe in nothing. But ask “in whom they believe” and the reply will always be definite—in some personality. Man has never built a temple or reared an altar or offered a sacrifice or breathed a prayer to an abstract principle! Where there is worship, there is the demand for a person.

All men need someone who will enable them to cope successfully or to rise above the varied circumstances which crowd in on them from every conceivable direction. Many people today and many families are placed in a perpetual state of depression and depriva-



tion. They are confronted daily with poverty and its twin sister anxiety—the perpetual question of today's or the tomorrows' bodily supplies. Many people are sick and afflicted, sick in mind and in body. Others are disappointed—a perpetual experience, the bitterness of which is never quite lost. Still others are captured by the feeling of inferiority, physical and mental dullness, the dreary unmarked round of duties. These are the misplaced persons in our world whose spirits are dominated by futility and despair. The deep wishes of their hearts are denied and their whole existence is a want, a hunger for someone who cares.

Black Americans are caught in the constricting net of racism and they are the victims of every conceivable form of repression. The society in which they live appears to be structured so as to keep them in a constant state of helplessness and enslavement. Under the weight of these crushing events—racism, exploitation, oppression, and estrangement—black Americans need Someone, the Liberator, the Holy One of God to serve as their Divine Leader and Deliverer. All men today need someone who has the love and power to reinforce their feeble lives so as to equip them to meet successfully the varied circumstances of our complex world.

The needs and wants of our nature are varied and complex. All men need a savior, a God with us to lift them from and above their sins. Of all the wants of the world, this is the deepest because all men are ruled by the tyranny of sin. Other aspects of their lives men may keep to themselves; they cannot hush the bitter cry of unquiet shame and fear of longing for release, for peace and goodness. This desire, freedom from sin and oppression, rises like a vast cloud of sorrow toward heaven from the universal heart of man. Ethics, science, philosophy, and theology cannot furnish the healing and release from sin which men crave. Only Jesus, the Liberator, the Oppressed One of God, can supply this need!

Jesus, the Liberator is the ideal, the source of life, the truth, and the way. Men must go to him for their ideals. You will remember the story about a certain painter who kept a set of precious stones in his studio. He needed these stones in order to refresh his sense of color. He would often turn back to them when he had lost the vivid sense of blue or crimson. In this calm, unfading depth he never failed to find new tone and beauty. So, we need someone to give us back the glory of lost ideals, to tune up our stale lives, to keep our hearts up to pitch. Only Jesus, the Liberator can give us the ideals which will enable men to live the more abundant life.

Black Americans must go to him—Jesus, the Liberator—if they are to discover who they are and the nature of their true identity. Black Americans are concerned about the problems of identity, lib-

eration, power, history, justice, and the authenticity of black humanity. The intellectual movements labeled black studies, black theology, Black Power, and black history are designed to provide the correct answer to the questions which are stirring the black community. These inquiries are seeking to provide the answers to the question of identity and an explanation of blackness which issues into relief, rebirth, and liberation. These movements are designed to correct whatever distortions and erroneous ideas are presented about Blacks in this American society. These critical investigations are demands of justice for the disinherited Blacks. Black Americans know that when the exploiting white racist society calls for law and order, law and order as interpreted by this group never serves the disinherited and that when law and order serves for purposes of exploitation the cry for justice may demand disorder. Black Americans recognize now that the race needs black physicists as well as black philosophers, black politicians as well as black poets, black engineers as well as black writers, black business as well as black blues. Yes, if the race is to do its thing, it must have these and more—black chemists, black inventors, black astronauts, black senators, vice-presidents, and presidents. Black Americans must be free to pursue their legitimate personal goals, secure in the dignity of their manhood, respecting those structures which make their freedom secure.

The quest of human dignity, identity liberation, and power has stirred the hearts and minds of black Americans. Many who have made the quest have sought to understand themselves and their position in the world in terms of economics, government, history, science, philosophy, sociology, music, and literature. These are legitimate avenues through which the pursuit for dignity and liberation may be sought. However, the Christian faith teaches that the concept of man, of human nature, dignity, identity, and liberation is derived from the nature of one particular man: Jesus, the Liberator. Neither the study of the phenomena of humanity in general nor the exact science of man in particular discovers the true man, what man really is, within that limited field of research. Man discovers who he is only through Jesus, the Liberator as the revealed word of God addressed to man.

Jesus, the Liberator is the universal, sufficient, and timeless light of the world. He is the ultimate source of truth and goodness, the irreplaceable and indispensable savior who stands between the perils of the world and God's gracious promise. Jesus, the Liberator is the truth that sits in judgment and embraces all truths. In him there is revealed to man the truth about God, the universe, and man. He is the bridge between God and the world, between God and man, and man and man. The one comprehensive truth is Jesus, the Liberator

and the various truths which are found in our world merely witness to the truth found in him.

The revelation of God in Jesus, the Liberator tells us not only that man is incapable of knowing himself and who and what he is in reality, but that man because of his sinful human nature is estranged from his own true reality. To discover the real man, black Americans and all men must turn to the man Jesus, the Liberator who by his ministry of service recovered for all men their true humanity. When men look at Jesus, the Liberator they discover that man is God's creature and that he is willed and created by God as a being, existing in fellowship both with God and with his fellow-men. The being of man is a being in relationship namely to God and to other men. Man is real man only as he exists in this twofold relationship with God and other men, and this relation to God and to other men is an essential part of man's humanity. Man has true humanity only as it is directed toward God and his neighbor, only as it is God-related and man-related! This is man's true nature. Who man is is determined by God. The exact science of man—biology, psychology, sociology, history—is concerned with man only insofar as he represents one of the phenomena of the cosmos. These sciences can only show how man is and exists, but never what man is as God intended him to be. The want to discover who man is is satisfied only when man stands in the presence of Jesus, the Liberator. Only when man discovers Jesus, the Liberator does he discover his own true self. Jesus, the Liberator is the source of life whom God has made man's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and liberation!

*Finally, who will man put in the place of Jesus, the Liberator? Or what will man substitute for the gospel of the Son of God?* There are those who have sought to destroy Jesus, the Liberator, to misinterpret him, to use his name and influence to justify every conceivable program which is designed to oppress and to destroy. Others have contended that the lusty technicians of our modern society should not be bound by a set of ideas that originated with an insignificant Jew who once lived in an obscure corner of the earth. These charges and objections that are hurled against Jesus, the Liberator do not feed the souls of men. Men need something positive, some great spiritual affirmation, a ray of hope, the divine word, as they stand huddled, frightened, shivering, and slaughtered on this sand bank of finite existence. I press the question: "If we do not go to Jesus, the Liberator, where shall we go?" Shall we cast our lots with the erotics of our time? Shall we bury ourselves in our fears and misgivings? Shall we drown our hopes and aspirations in the neurotic pleasures which dominate a large segment of our contemporary world? Neurotic husks may be good enough for hogs in a

pen, but to men who are made in God's image and in quest for identity, liberation, and meaning they are vile, loathsome, and sickening!

"To whom shall we go?" Shall we fill our guts from the wells of materialism and live by the maxim "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die"? Multitudes are trying to drown their disgust in the deeper cups of pleasure and materialism. These men are in and of the world. Men call the doctrine of Jesus, the Liberator "hard," "but how much harder," cried Tolstoi, "how much harder is the doctrine of the world? In my own life I can reckon up as much suffering caused by following the doctrines of the world as many martyrs have endured for the doctrine of Jesus." To be sure, the modern martyrs are not in the church, they are in the world! They are the devotees of finance and business, of sports, science, and technology, eroticism, secularism, and materialism. These crucifixions are gratuitous! They demand the cross without the crown—death without life, defeat without victory!

"To whom shall we go?" Shall we turn to ourselves and make ourselves our standard? Shall we look to ourselves, to our own meager selves with our faults, our appetites, tastes, and pettiness and make these the goals of our lives? If we do this we shall lack the one thing that elevates because he who lives to himself dies to himself. To absolutize the self is to carve a path that leads to absorbing and unsatisfied hunger which eventually ends in death. The quest to find a substitute for Jesus, the Liberator ends in failure because he alone has the words of eternal life.

There are too many witnesses in his favor for us to leave him—Jesus, the Liberator. His liberating ministry designed to set the captives free has excited the minds, hearts, and spirits of black Americans. Gustavus Vassa petitioned the Queen of England in March 1788 on behalf of his black brothers with these words: "That they may be raised from the condition of brutes to which they are at present degraded to the rights and situation of free men."<sup>2</sup> Then comes the witness of Joseph Cinque, African prince and revolutionist; Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Opener; Jacques Dessalines, the Deliverer; Henri Christophe, "the Master Builder." In 1775 Patrick Henry cried, "Give me liberty or give me death" and died in bed fourteen years later. In 1770 Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave, cried, "Do not be afraid," and later fell dead on the frozen ground of Boston Common, the first to die for independence. Benjamin Banneker, the mathematical wizard and inventor, and David Walker, the fighter for freedom, who declared, "I will stand my ground. Somebody must die in this cause. I may be doomed to the stake and fire or to the scaffold tree but it is not in me to falter

if I can promote the work of emancipation.”<sup>3</sup> Denmark Vesey, the anti-slavery insurrectionist, Nat Turner, anti-slavery revolutionist, and William Still, underground railroad leader, were witnesses. Harriet Tubman, called the Black Moses of her race, Sojourner Truth, “a pilgrim of freedom,” and Frederick A. Douglass, the golden trombone of abolition, followed the lead of Jesus, the Liberator. Norbert Rillieux, slave scientist, George Washington Carver, “savior of southern agriculture,” Daniel Hale Williams, heart surgeon, Ernest E. Just, biologist, and Charles Drew, who was a pioneer in blood plasma research, were on the case. And what more shall we say? For time would fail us to tell you about Robert S. Abbot, Martin de Porres, William H. Miles, Richard Allen, John Hope, Marcus A. Garvey, W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King, Jr., “who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness . . .—of whom the world was not worthy (Heb. 11:33-34a, 38).”

Jesus’ words of eternal life were words about the nature of that life which he came into the world to proclaim. They were words about the training and discipline which he required of all participants in his ministry of love and liberation. They were words about the comforts and encouragements which he offered to the heavy-laden, the forsaken, and prisonbound. They were words of command, setting forth the basic requirements for discipleship: to take up his cross and follow him. They were words setting forth the reckless demands of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 10:37-39:

He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

The words of eternal life are the words and deeds of Jesus, the Liberator, who he is and what he is doing—making alive and judging. His words are identical with himself. His words are life and truth but he is also life and truth. His words are his testimony and must be accepted because to reject his word is to reject him. His words are utterances about himself—“The bread of life, it is I,” “The light of the world, it is I,” “The door, it is I,” “The resurrection and life are I.”<sup>4</sup>

Affirmation about the life-giving words of Jesus have emerged out of the black Christian experience expressing who Jesus is and what his words do; “Bread in a starving land, it is I,” “Rock in a weary

land, it is I," "Water in dry places, it is I," "Shelter in the time of storm, it is I." Jesus, the Liberator has and is the word of eternal life—words of life and judgment.

I once heard an account of the Great Judgment in which the depressed and exploited peoples of the world appeared before God. This multitude of people who stood in God's presence were the victimized ones—the Indians who had been slaughtered by the white man, robbed of their native land, and confined to reservations where many of them died like animals; black Americans who bore on their backs the scars of slavery and on their hearts and minds the lasting marks of second-class citizenship; the Chinese who had been exploited by the technology of the Western Christian world and who knew the depth and pangs of poverty; the brown people of India who for hundreds of years had been exploited by the so-called Christian British Empire; the dispossessed, poverty-ridden dark people of South America. These people, the dispossessed ones, the oppressed peoples of the world, ask God, "What right do you have to pronounce judgment on us? You are God and being God you know nothing about hunger, poverty, discrimination, oppression, segregation, and being exploited. You have not had our experience and therefore you are not qualified to pronounce judgment on us." When God heard the protest of the disinherited ones, he asked them to present to him the requirements which he must possess if he is to have the authority and right to pronounce his divine word of judgment on them. A committee was named to do this. After many days of deliberation the committee, with the multitude of the oppressed people of the world, once again appeared before the throne of God and made their report, specifying the characteristics and the experiences which God must possess if he were to have the right to pronounce his judgment on them. They declared:

Let God become a Jew, a poor black Jew. Let him be born in one of the smaller exploited countries of the world ruled by the iron hand of some great foreign power. Let God experience persecution, poverty, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression. Let God be possessed with a great idea about the kind of world in which men ought to live and let him teach his ideas to the people of his own group. Let God be betrayed by those who profess to love him, and be forsaken by his closest friends when he is caught in the iron vise of the governmental rulers of his day. Let God be condemned unjustly and the verdict of guilt be pronounced upon him. Let a cross be placed on his back, and let him be whipped up some hill and suffer the most excruciating death that man can devise—crucifixion. Let God be nailed to that cross and hang between heaven and earth, deserted, forsaken, and alone. Let him die there alone, alone, alone!

When the committee of the oppressed ones read their report in the presence of God, a great silence and hush came over the audience. In the flash of a moment, like some great spiritual awakening, the oppressed peoples who stood before the throne of God suddenly realized that God in the life of Jesus, the Liberator had already done this. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Go ahead! Right on, brother! Amen!

## THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL, COMMITMENT, AND COMMISSION

Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brethren who are with me.

—Galatians 1:1-2

“Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man.” An apostle, one who was sent on a mission, to preach the gospel, to build churches—this is Paul’s apostolate. He defines his apostleship negatively, that is, he was not appointed by men nor commissioned by any man. The two phrases when translated literally, are “neither from *men*,” nor “through man,” as if the former referred to the ultimate source of the authority being transmitted. Paul is here claiming to be an apostle, but to have an apostleship which is in no sense indirect, dependent, or secondary. The source of his apostleship is divine in that it came to him by, *dia*, that is, through revelation of Jesus Christ. He seems to be saying, “If I am an apostle, as I am, it is not because I appeared as a candidate before a body of men and was elected by them, but because God himself elected me.”

Positively, Paul asserts that his apostleship came to him “through Jesus Christ and God the Father”; *dia Iesou Christou kai Theou patros*. Three facts are to be noted in this expression: (1) the preposition *dia* indicates that the apostle is speaking not simply of his apostleship between which and himself there intervenes an agent, but of the channel through which it came to him: (2) the addition of *kai Theou patros* to *Iesou Christou* shows that he is not thinking simply of the agency through which his apostleship came to him, but also of the source, of which, being ultimate, there can be no higher; (3) both substantives are governed by one preposition, thus indicating that Jesus Christ and God the Father are not separated in his mind as sustaining different relationships, but are conceived of jointly and as sustaining one relation. George Duncan finely notes:

The very fact that Paul can combine these two ideas in one composite prepositional phrase shows that for him the action



of God as Originator and that of Jesus Christ as Transmitter are not separate and distinct, but together constitute a direct divine intervention which *leaves no place for dependence on human agencies*.<sup>1</sup>

One should note that the names Jesus and God are linked together by the words, "who raised him from the dead." This clause has a twofold meaning: (1) It supplies an answer to the objection made to Paul's claim to be regarded as an apostle sent forth by Jesus Christ. There were those who said, "You have never seen Christ or been taught by him, like those who were called by him." Paul's answer appears to be: "Your objection might have some validity if Jesus was no more than a dead man; but he is not that. Jesus lives. He has been raised from the dead by the Father. I have seen him myself, and he, through no intervention of human agency, gave me both the commission to preach and the gospel which I was to preach." (2) It connects the action of God the Father with that of Jesus Christ in appointing Paul to be an apostle. One must remember that Paul is concerned to vindicate in this epistle not only his apostleship, but also the content of that gospel, no less than his call to preach it. And he claims that this was given to him by the revelation of Christ, risen and ascended.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen (Gal. 1:2-5).

These verses contain the customary greeting of Paul: grace, gracefulness, attractiveness, graciousness, kindness, goodwill, thanks. Grace is what God has done for us through Jesus Christ; it is indeed God's gift of himself to sinful men. Grace denotes the outpouring of divine love in all spiritual blessings as sinful creatures need. The effect of God's grace is peace—that calm sense of reconciliation and perfect security against evil which constitutes the peculiar happiness of a man who believes in Christ. Peace is more than freedom from external strife. Paul filled the Greek word *eirene* with the Hebrew *shalom* thereby implying "soundness" and total well-being for time and eternity. The civil war in man's soul is ended, and man is at peace in Christ, knowing that whatever cross-bearing he must endure, God has accepted him as a son and heir.

"Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age," is a fundamental belief of the Christian church which would be accepted by all, and may have been part of an early Christian confession. Jesus who gave "himself for our sins" is Lord. "Jesus is Lord" was and is the fundamental declaration of the Christian faith (Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 4:5).

Jesus as Lord was present in the hearts of his followers, giving them peace and freedom. This Jesus, who was the Son of God and Lord, took the form of a slave and died for our sins (Philippians 2:7).

Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age." The present age was characterized by sin and death, and was under the sway of principalities and powers which intervened between man and God. In the gentile world, it was thought that the present world was ruled by dread inhuman forces—fate, guilt, demons, sin—and the various cults of that world offered ways of escape from the iron necessities of life, and pointed to a higher and better world. Paul insisted that in the age to come, sin and death would be no more and God would be present in the midst of his redeemed people.

Paul takes over the idea of the two ages, and he interprets these two ages in the light of what he had learned from the risen Lord. He preached that Jesus was the looked-for Messiah, and that God's kingdom would be soon inaugurated in its fullness; and that those who had accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior could share this new life. In support of his conviction, Paul appealed to the resurrection of Jesus, which, according to Paul, had broken the authority of the powers of this present world, and the gift of the Holy Spirit was evidence that the powers of the world to come were already operative in the lives of the believers. This was, according to Paul, the "will of our God and Father." The purpose of God in the ministry of Jesus—his life, teaching, death, and resurrection—was to create persons capable of spiritual fellowship with himself. God is still the Sovereign Creator and Judge of the world. God through Jesus Christ has given to man freedom—freedom for sonship and freedom from sin. This Paul wanted—the power to live without sinning, and a new life which could fulfill the purpose for which God had set him apart before he was born.

The doxology, "To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen," represents the joyous outburst of a soul overwhelmed by the goodness of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's glory is seen in his character as Creator of the world and Judge of men. But God is also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the new element in the "glory of God." The word glory is rooted in the Greek verb *dokeo*, which means to think, suppose, and be reputed. The glory of God includes what rational creatures think of him, the estimation, repute, and honor which they accord him.

The "amen" of Paul expresses his faith in God's grace through Christ, and with this word he praised God for the opportunity to live a life that would cause others to form right ideas about Jesus Christ and accept Christ for themselves.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:6-10).

The circumstances which made necessary Paul's writing of this letter are presented in verses 6-10. In all of his other letters, Paul begins with thanksgiving to God. This is omitted in this letter, and the coldness and abruptness of his words show his deep anxiety and grief. He writes, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel." *Thaumazo*, I marvel. The verb is used here with reference to something disappointing, something felt to be painful as well as strange. Paul was genuinely surprised, for he had every reason for thinking well of them (Galatians 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:7). How could converts, once so cordial and affectionate, have possibly been so misled? The Greek word for deserting, *metatitheske*, means alter, transpose, substitute, pervert, or change one's mind. With the Greek adverb *tacheos*, which means quickly, soon, *metatitheske* expresses the shortness of time between their reception of the gospel and their proposal to change. "Him who called you," *tou kalesantos*, may refer to either Christ or God. Generally, Paul thinks of God as the source of his call (Romans 8:30; 9:11; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 7:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). The apostle thus impressively describes their defection from the truth of the gospel as none other than a defection from God himself. The absence of the article from the Greek phrase *ev charti Christou* gives it a qualitative force; it is no ordinary grace but the "grace of Christ" that the legalists were proposing to supplement by law. *Ev charti* refers to the *sphere* of the Christian existence; namely, "in the sphere of grace," and suggests the *manner* of the Christian existence, "in loving kindness and forgiveness," and it indicates the *purpose* of his life "to live in grace."

"I am astonished that you are . . . turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." In this verse we are confronted with a problem of syntax, and possibly a literal translation will make its meaning clear: "to another gospel, which is not another, only there are some who trouble you." It is to be noted that the word another is represented in the two clauses by two dif-

ferent Greek words, *heteron* and *allos*. The point is that Paul found neither *heteron* (different) nor *allos* (another) admissible when speaking of the gospel which Christ had incarnated. There is only one gospel of Christ, and these people who are disturbing you are attempting to pervert that gospel. By the gospel of Christ Paul means something far more than the news of the kingdom which Jesus had preached. The gospel is that of which Jesus Christ is the very essence and substance—how through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God had established a new relationship with his people, redeeming them out of an evil world and calling them to life eternal.

Verses 8-10 underscore Paul's love for and pride in the gospel and his deep revulsion at anything which would rob it of its greatness, splendor, love, and truth. Tie on to this gospel of grace, this glorious gospel of grace, the demands of legalistic relationship, and what you get is not another legitimate form of the gospel but a distortion of it so essentially evil that those who advocate it deserve to be cut off from the body of Christ and from all participation in the benefits which it brings. When Paul reflects on the present situation, he refuses to believe that what has happened has really taken place. But in a moment he is forced to face the tragic realities of the present situation among his converts.

The tone of these verses reminds us of what one may find in 1 Corinthians 5:2-5; 2 Corinthians 11:4ff., 13-15; Philippians 3:2, and in some of the denunciations of the Pharisees by Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Its terrible significance must not be toned down. We hear and see in these verses Paul's passionate devotion to the true gospel of which he had been put in trust, and for the sake of whose furtherance among his own people he says he would willingly himself become "accursed and cut off from Christ (Rom. 9:3)."

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:11-17).

In this section of the epistle, Paul tells how the gospel came to him, not through human agency but by divine revelation; how he reacted to the gospel, and what he did immediately after its reception; how this gospel had determined once and for all his career and conduct.

Paul begins by stating, "For I would have you know, brethren." "For I declare to you, brethren." The verb *gnorizo* suggests a somewhat formal or solemn assertion. Immediately, one is aware that there is a difference of tone between this section and the previous section. The previous section is characterized by intense excitement of feeling. In this section, Paul seeks to take himself in hand, and his use of the verb *gnorizo* prefaces a deliberate and measured statement. Please note that Paul uses the word brethren, indicating that he is now entering into this new phase of the discussion quietly and soberly. One receives the impression that after verse 10, Paul laid down his pen and paused to reflect how he had best proceed, and he resumed his work with the purpose of calmly showing, from the very circumstances of his personal history, that the gospel which the Galatians had received from him had solely a divine origin.

"The gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel." The gospel is, as Moffatt translates, "not a human affair." What was true of Paul's apostleship, that it came to him not from man but from God, was even more fundamentally true of the gospel which he was commissioned to preach. Paul insists on the divine nature as well as the divine origin of his gospel. The gospel is not to be regarded as a product of human evolution or explained solely by reference to its so-called historical origins. A gospel according to man would have had no cross to scandalize the Jews and incur the ridicule of the worldly wise (1 Corinthians 1:18-30).

The gospel that came from God was a cross borne by God's own Son. Paul's gospel was revolutionary. His God was in Christ sacrificing himself for men. The Son of God was King indeed, but a King who ruled by enslaving himself and dying for his creation. His subjects were saved not because they had never disobeyed the law but because they had responded in faith to his grace. Their King had taught that all were his brothers who do God's will, and now through his church he was calling all men to join his brotherhood and be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Romans 8:29-30).

With regard to himself, Paul says, "For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it." That is, no man put the gospel into my hands and no man taught me what it meant. In these two clauses Paul probably has in mind the two stages in his religious life, before and after his conversion: (1) No man put the gospel in my

hands—which means that his apprehension of the gospel is not to be explained by reference to his early environment and religious education. (2) By the phrase, “no man taught me,” Paul means that his understanding of the gospel did not come through sitting at the feet of teachers who explained to him its essential truths.

This gospel, Paul says, “came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” The revelation of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord at Damascus, was the same as that of Jesus to his disciples on the third day after his crucifixion in Palestine. The phrase Jesus Christ must be interpreted as an objective genitive in that it refers to God’s revelation of Jesus Christ to Paul rather than referring to Christ as the revealer of himself. That the change came through a revelation concentrates attention on Paul’s initial vision. Paul is insisting that his fellowship with the risen Lord was as personal as the fellowship of the disciples with the earthly Jesus. Time, space, and physical sight were not in themselves the essential factors in this companionship. The original apostles’ understanding of the mission and message of Jesus depended, even as Paul’s, upon spiritual affinity and response to him. Paul, who had probably not seen Jesus in his earthly body, was infinitely closer to him than were Judas and Pilate. This spiritual apprehension could not be conveyed by tradition alone. Through his Spirit, Jesus became the eternal contemporary of every generation of men. His continuing self-disclosure and the creative guidance of his followers could not be confined to a fixed quantum of tradition thrust once for all into the stream of history and handed down from the original disciples after the manner of the scribes who sat in Moses’ seat.

Paul goes on to say, “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.” In proof of what he has asserted regarding the God-given character of his gospel in verses 11 and 12, Paul recalls in one short sentence the main features of his life before the gospel was revealed to him. He pictures his past career in Judaism—a career which, as we gather from this passage and from Philippians 3:4-6, was one of surpassing promise according to the standard by which it was regulated and inspired. The thought from which Paul could never get away was that *that* career of his was directly contrary to the purposes of God. “That fellowship of the followers of Jesus Christ, which now I know to be none other than the church of God, God’s chosen holy people, I persecuted furiously—beyond measure; seeking to destroy it.” Paul never ceased to be staggered by the thought that it was to him, a persecutor and a blasphemer, that Christ had appeared; and that fact, which from one point of

view was a supreme revelation of the grace of God, to Paul was proof of the truth of his gospel as coming from God and not from man.

"But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . ." These verses must be understood as a continuation of what Paul related in verses 13 and 14, and the introductory particle ought to be "and" rather than "but." Paul's argument is that, as *before* his conversion, so also *after* it the circumstances and environment of his life were such that in no sense could the gospel as he understood and preached it have been "evolved" out of them. His gospel was given him directly because God himself had broken in upon his life and had given him a special revelation. He describes this breaking in of God on his life with a sense of rapture and awe, recognizing the fact that it was God who had done everything for him.

Every word in the description tells of the divine purpose and initiative: Paul himself was a mere recipient. Tracing the hand of God in his life from the beginning and recalling how Jeremiah had described his own call, he dares to say of himself, "God set me apart from my very birth." In fulfillment of an eternal purpose God likewise called him—as he had called Israel—called him who persecuted the church of God to have himself a place in the fellowship; called him who was a blasphemer to become an apostle. No wonder that the very thought of this call moved Paul to add that God had acted in his "grace." God called him and, Paul continues, God chose "to reveal his Son to me." That is, "in me." Here again the initiative is entirely with God. He acts of his own good pleasure, and Paul claims no credit for the religious insight. By using the phrase "his Son" in this connection, Paul implies that God had opened his eyes to see Jesus in his true character. Jesus was not a mere teacher; neither, despite his crucifixion, was he an accursed blasphemer; rather Jesus was one whom God acknowledged as his Son.

In his own description of his conversion (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8; 2 Corinthians 4:6) Paul always emphasizes the reality of the inward experience. "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me." No horizontal line of cause and effect could explain it: it had come vertically from above. The living God, unsearchable in his sovereign freedom, inscrutable in his absolute wisdom, had there and then interposed. What shattered the flaming career of persecution, wrenched the stubborn Pharisee right around in his track, killed the blasphemer, and gave birth to the saint was nothing illusory: it was the most real thing in life, as real as the fact of God, as real as the risen life of Christ. It was, in the apostle's own words, an "arrest." It was a "revelation." It was a new divine "let there be light."

Grace on the side of God had met faith on the side of man and from the white hot crucible of that experience there emerged a new life. The cataclysm of that hour ushered Paul into a totally different sphere of being. He was as unlike the man who had set out from Jerusalem as noonday is unlike midnight, as life is unlike death. His outlook, his world, his nature, his moral sense, his life purpose—all were changed. He was a new man, a man "in Christ."



## "ALL IS OF GRACE AND GRACE IS FOR ALL"

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.

—Galatians 2:1-2

Paul relates the story of the second visit to Jerusalem during which time he conferred with the leaders of the church—Peter, James, and John. This visit took place after an interval of fourteen years, and he went to Jerusalem "by revelation." Barnabas and Titus, the gentile, accompanied Paul, and in the person of Titus, the church was confronted with the problem of race—that is, whether a gentile would be accepted as a member of the Christian fellowship solely on the basis of the grace of God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul's choice of companions was deliberate—Barnabas and Titus. Consider Barnabas. He was the one who had expressed faith in Paul and helped to get him started in his life's work as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Barnabas is presented to us in the New Testament as an attractive and effective Christian. Because of his character and the esteem in which he was held by the other apostles, they had given to him the name, Barnabas, "son of encouragement." He possessed both the genius and the love which led him to discover others who were destined to overshadow him, as in the case of Paul and John Mark. He was a fair-minded man, who enjoyed the confidence of both the conservatives and the liberals, and therefore, was especially fitted to assist in solving this pressing problem with which the church was confronted. He is described as, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (Acts 11:24)."

Paul states, "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me." Titus is presented to us as Paul's "partner and fellow worker." He was a man of tact and good judgment, one who could be trusted with difficult assignments. More than once, he had been used as a channel of God's strength and comfort to Paul (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6-7, 13-15; 8:16-17, 23). The only fault the Judaizers could find with him was that he was a gentile.

"I laid before them . . . the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles." I went up, not because I was summoned by the apostles of "repute," but rather because of *kata apokalupsin*, in consequence of a revelation, a revelation which had come to him. Paul wants to make it clear that no personal motive lay behind his visit. He went to see the Jerusalem authorities to confer with them. During this visit "I laid before them . . . the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles." *Every word in 2b is important: kai anethemenautois to euangelion ho kerusso ev tois ethnesin.*

The question at issue between Paul and those of a different opinion in Jerusalem was not historical, nor practical in the sense that they pertained to the methods of gospel work, but doctrinal, having to do with the significance of the work of Christ, the conditions of salvation, and the obligations of the believers. "I submitted the gospel." Paul does not say he consulted anyone as a pupil might consult a master. His gospel had already been given to him by revelation, and what he did was to tell the people about it—he submitted it.

Now, what he submitted was *the gospel*. He submitted the gospel to the Jewish-Christian community and to the "authorities"—James, Peter, and John. To be sure, under the term of the gospel would come the question of the conditions on which gentiles would be admitted into the Christian faith. But beneath this question lay the more fundamental questions of the nature of the salvation which was being offered, the character and purposes of God who offered it, and the means which God took to make salvation operative.

Paul saw that the work of evangelization among fellow Jews had not exhausted the meaning of the gospel. The Jewish Christians must understand what the gospel might mean for gentiles. The full significance of Jesus Christ is something which must be grasped "with all the saints (Eph. 3:18)." On this important matter Paul believed that he had received clear light by revelation. Paul knew that in the light of the Damascus road he had found the truth for which all men everywhere were seeking, the truth for lack of which Jew and gentile alike were perishing; and there rang through his being the imperious command that to the proclamation of this truth his whole life must henceforth be devoted. "They who have the torch," says the old Greek proverb, "must pass on the light." Hence Paul would never tolerate any minimizing of his apostolic office. It was expressly to claim him for God's work that Christ had appeared outside the Damascus gates . . . "I am an envoy for Christ," he tells the Corinthians. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God," is his introduction to the Romans. "The man who is now speaking," comments Karl Barth, "is an emissary, bound to perform his duty; the minister of his King; a

servant, not a master.”<sup>1</sup> “I laid before them . . . the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.”

The task of Paul, in this instance, was difficult. He had to preserve his gospel and achieve the unity of the church. To do this he had to demolish the barriers between Jew and gentiles and get the Jewish Christians to see and admit that they too were being saved by grace alone. This required the neutralization of centuries of anti-gentile prejudice which had been forged into the protective armor of the Jews by Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Maccabees. At the same time he had to answer the charge of opening the kingdom of God to gentiles on such easy terms as to render faith in Christ morally impotent. Compromise arrayed in the sheep clothing of “tact” would not answer; only the love of all Christians for each other in Christ could avail.

But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you (Gal. 2:3-5).

These verses constitute one very long sentence in Greek, and the numerous variants illustrate some of the textual difficulties. The main Greek manuscripts, with one exception, substantiate the Revised Standard Version translation. Codex D, the old Latin version, omits the two opening words, the *relative* and the *negative*, making verse 5 read, “but owing to the false brethren . . . we yielded for an hour.” This omission is not supported by major manuscripts of the New Testament. (See Lightfoot’s note, pp. 121-22.) Therefore, the best attested reading is “*hois oude pros oran.*”

“But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.” Not even Titus. The fact of the presence of Titus with Paul had already been mentioned in the preceding verse. The repetition here in *ho sun emoi* merely emphasized the fact that Titus was a gentile, and that he was not circumcised.

The mention of Titus’ name in this connection was designed to create interest in the minds of Paul’s readers. He is introduced as known to the Galatians, and by this time his name was known in the Pauline churches as a fellow traveler and a trusted helper of Paul. He was with Paul in the latter part of the third missionary tour and may have been with Paul when he paid his second visit to the churches of Galatia. He belonged to the heathen mission, and was Paul’s true child after a common faith (Titus 1:4), an uncircumcised man of gentile birth—equally with the Galatians. One may

assume that Paul took Titus with him when he came before the church at its public assemblies, when he appeared before the select meeting of the apostles and elders, when he joined the brethren in the agape meal and the Lord's Supper.

And now, the Galatians read of Titus "going up to Jerusalem with Paul," to the mother city of believers, where the pillars of the church were—the Jewish teachers—the true apostles of Jesus, where Jesus' doctrine is preached in its purity, and where every Christian is circumcised and keeps the law. Titus, the unclean gentile, at Jerusalem. How could he be admitted or tolerated there in the fellowship of the first disciples of Jesus?

Paul, in bringing Titus, had brought up the subject matter of the controversy. The "gospel of the uncircumcision" stood before the Jewish authorities as an accomplished fact. Titus was there, by the side of Paul, a sample—and a noble specimen, we can well believe—of gentile Christendom which the Jewish church must either acknowledge or repudiate. How will they treat him? Will they admit this gentile to their communion? Or will they require him first to be circumcised? The question at issue could not take a form more crucial for the prejudices of the mother church at Jerusalem. It was one thing to acknowledge uncircumcised gentile fellow believers in the abstract, away in Antioch or Caesarea; but another thing to see Titus standing among them in his heathen uncleanness, on the sacred soil of Jerusalem, under the shadow of the temple, and to hear Paul claiming for him—for this "dog" of a gentile—equally with himself the rights of Christian brotherhood!

Titus must have been one of the first purely gentile Christians whom the Jerusalem church had had in its midst—perhaps the first to appear at least in a semi-official capacity. As a Christian he would be welcomed gladly; but as a gentile he raised a number of problems which until now had never presented themselves concretely in the fellowship. With Paul and other fellow Christians Titus would naturally go up to the temple precincts. But when the others entered the temple proper, must he be left behind? More serious still, for it concerned relations within the fellowship, what was to happen when they sat down at the Lord's Table, or even at a meal in a private house? Must Titus be asked to sit apart?

Now the question must be asked: What happened to Titus? The incoherence of the language of verses 3-5 suggests that Paul is dealing with a matter of extreme delicacy. Paul's words in verses 3-5 are somewhat ambiguous, and F. C. Burkitt observed, "who can doubt that it was the knife which really did circumcise Titus that has cut the syntax of Galatians 2:3-5 to pieces."<sup>2</sup> J. B. Lightfoot notes: "The counsels of the Apostles of the Circumcision are the

hidden rock on which the grammar of the sentence is wrecked.”<sup>3</sup> The passion that spoils the grammar must be the bitterness of the controversy raised by the false brethren—the brethren who insisted that a man must become a Jew before he could become a Christian. This bitterness Paul vividly remembers in the midst of this renewed controversy!

A thorough study of these verses suggests that there were three parties involved in the situation under discussion at Jerusalem. (1) There were, first, Paul and Barnabas, who stood for the policy of receiving gentiles as Christians without circumcision. (2) There were those whom Paul characterized as “false brethren,” and who contended that the gentile Christian must be circumcised, and (3) there were those who for the sake of “unity” urged Titus and Paul to waive their scruples and consent to the circumcision of Titus.

The words “Titus was not compelled” suggest that pressure was applied on Titus. Titus was plied, we may propose, with theological arguments, with appeals to his brotherly sympathies, with appeals to his prudent care for public peace, with threats of social and religious excommunication, and with stern, indignant remonstrances.

Now the question must be asked: Was Titus circumcised? To mention just a few, George Duncan and J. N. Sanders answer in the affirmative. Writes Duncan:

The false brothers . . . obviously insisted that fellowship with Titus on the part of Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem could not be encouraged or even condoned unless Titus was circumcised—and on our interpretation of the incident Paul decided, for practical reasons, to give way on the matter, though he is careful also to maintain that he was not “obliged” to do so.<sup>4</sup>

Sanders contends: “Paul agreed, no doubt reluctantly, to a concession in this one case, in order to secure approval of the general principle ‘No circumcision of Gentile converts.’ The textual authority is not strong, but it remains a possibility that Titus *was* in fact circumcised.”<sup>5</sup> William Neil suggests the idea that some kind of concession was made to Jewish-Christian feelings, but goes on to note, “But to agree to his [Titus’] circumcision even in these highly special circumstances would surely have been to cut the ground from under his own feet, and to undermine the impression which he is laboriously trying to create, namely that the leaders of the Church support his views and policy up to the hilt.”<sup>6</sup>

The position of J. B. Lightfoot and Ernest DeWitt Burton that Titus was not circumcised is not only supported by textual evidence, but also by the very nature of the situation in which Paul

found himself, and what he was attempting to prove to the Galatians. Lightfoot argues:

1. The incident is apparently brought forward to show that Paul had throughout contended for the liberty of the Gentiles; that he had not, as his enemies insinuated, at one time conceded the question of circumcision.

2. It is difficult to reconcile the view that Titus was circumcised with individual expressions in the passage. St. Paul could scarcely say "we yielded not for an hour" in the same breath in which he confessed to this most important of all concessions: he could hardly claim for such an act the merit of preserving "the truth of the gospel," i.e., the liberty of the Gentile Christians, which it was most calculated to compromise.<sup>7</sup>

Now concerning the text of Galatians 2:5, Lightfoot notes that "the negative is found in all Greek manuscripts—in Aleph, A, B, C, E, F, G, K, L, P—except D, in which however it is inserted by a later hand."<sup>8</sup>

. . . that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:5b-9a).

This sentence of more than ninety-five words, connected with relative pronouns and participles, is a good example of what happened to Paul when he was deeply affected emotionally. However, there are two fundamental ideas which stand forth in this sentence, and it is on these that we will comment.

(1) ". . . that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." He declares, "We did not yield . . . that the truth of the gospel might continue with you . . ." *hina he aletheia tou euangeliou diameine pros humas*. The clause states the purpose of his refusing to yield; that the truth of the gospel, ". . . *he aletheia tou euangeliou . . .*," might be continued with you. Or ". . . that the Truth of the Good News might be yours always . . ." (*The 20th Century New Testament*).<sup>9</sup> "We did not give those men an inch, for the truth of the Gospel for you and all Gentiles was at stake

(Phillips).”<sup>10</sup> “I was determined that the full truth of the Gospel should be maintained for you (NEB).” The truth, the sure unadulterated doctrine, which is embodied in the gospel, and is its very hinge and substance; the “truth” that is enunciated in verse 16, “that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ,” and that it is the very essence of the gospel is declared in Romans 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” The refusal of church fellowship to a believer of this gospel on racial grounds nullified the truth that faith in Christ is the sole and sufficient ground of justification.

This truth which the gospel contains and continues with us says something about the nature of God and the all inclusive nature of the Christian fellowship.

(2) “God shows no partiality,” *prosopon Theos anthropou ou lambanei*. “God is no respecter of persons (Conybeare).”<sup>11</sup> “God recognizes no external distinction (Weymouth).”<sup>12</sup> “God is not impressed with a man’s office (Phillips).”<sup>13</sup> “God does not recognize these personal distinctions (NEB).” “God accepts not the person of man.” The order of the words in the Greek text throws emphasis on *prosopon*—“person.” That is, it is never on account of man’s person that God accepts a man. This is due, as Bishop Lightfoot has shown, to the fact that when the phrase *prosopon lambanein* is used as an independent Greek phrase, “the bad sense attaches to it, owing to the secondary meaning of *prosopon* as ‘a mask,’ so that *prosopon lambanein* signifies ‘to regard the external circumstances of a man,’ his rank, wealth, etc., as opposed to his real intrinsic character.”<sup>14</sup> The phrase “accepts a man’s person” is always used in the New Testament in a bad sense. The corresponding technical term among the Romans was *persona*, a word never used for the natural face, as *prosopon* was. So the word person may be used to denote the part, or certain accessories of the part, which a man plays on the stage of human life in contradistinction to his more interior and essential character. The phrase denotes accepting a man, for example, for his worldly rank or position, for his office, for his nationality, even for his status in the church. And what Paul is saying in this passage is that his knowledge and service in the ministry is just as real and as great as the knowledge and ministry of James and the other members of the twelve, whom the enemies of Paul were honoring so far above him merely for their *person’s* sake. God made no such difference between him and them, but wrought with him just as much. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 11:22-23; 12:9b-10:

But whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death . . . I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

We have believed in Christ Jesus, and because we have believed in Christ Jesus, "you (we) are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28)." In Paul's day, as well as in ours, humanity was broken up by arbitrary distinctions of many kinds which set men against their fellows. There were racial differences like those of Jew and gentile, religious difference, lower and higher cultures; above all, the great class division of slave and free. Such differences, in spite of our Christian civilization, still persist, but in Paul's day they cut much deeper. It was assumed as a self-evident fact that between different nationalities or social groups there could be nothing in common. The Latin proverb passed without question, "Man is a wolf to his fellowman." Paul exclaims, "But now that faith is come!" Faith has come, the true emancipator of the human mind. It comes to take its place as the mistress of the soul, queen in the realm of the heart, to be henceforth its spring of life, the norm and guiding principle of its activity. It is faith in Christ which constitutes us sons of God. This principle is the foundation stone of the Christian life, and by receiving Christ, inwardly accepted by faith, visibly assumed in baptism, we are made sons of God. He makes us free of the house of God, where he *rules* as Son, and where no slave may any longer stay. Faith in Christ Jesus is the condition that opens the door to every human being—Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female. The faith of Jesus Christ restores the broken unity of mankind! One's racial heritage is not the last word for a Christian; "there is neither Jew nor Greek." One's social status is not the last word; "there is neither slave nor free." One's sex is not the last word; the Christian cause rests not upon gender but upon personality: "there is neither male nor female." Paul deals with these profound problems at the deepest level: "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the Galatian passage Paul says that faith in Christ has abol-



ished the old distinctions. In Colossians he writes: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:9-11)." Here Paul is saying in effect that these distinctions never really existed, for as men come to realize their true nature they discover that beneath all differences they are one.

## **"EVEN WE HAVE BELIEVED IN JESUS CHRIST"**

The previous study dealt with the question of race and the way in which the early church attempted to deal with it. Paul's answer is clear. The last word about man which determines his place in the Christian church is not his race, social status, or sex. Paul deals with this problem on a deeper level; that is, within the context of God's saving purposes in Jesus Christ: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28)."

The Titus case was a solution to the problem of race from the side of the gentile in his relationship to the Jews. That is, a gentile (Negro), did not have to become a Jew (white man) to become a Christian. Now Galatians 2:11-16 deals with the relationship of the Jews to the gentile within the context of the Christian fellowship. Would the Jew's history, his tradition, customs, his laws, his mores, limit and determine his relationship to the gentiles? Burton notes that the question here was one which concerned "the obligation of the Jewish Christian to keep the law, and particularly in the matter of food." Burton continues:

The Jerusalem brethren, on the other hand, might with equal sincerity maintain that they had never expressed or intimated the belief that the Jews could disregard the statutes of the law, and that the tacit understanding of the Jerusalem decision was that these statutes should be regarded as still in force for the Jews, whatever concessions were made in respect to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

According to Duncan,

the point at issue concerned table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians . . . . Even those who acknowledged the right of the Gentiles to become Christians without the necessity of circumcision were not at one on the practical question how far Jewish-Christians were free to sit down with their Gentile brethren at the same table, whether at a private party or (more particularly) at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup>

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party (Gal. 2:11-12).

The city of Antioch was the forum for the gentile Christian world. Its cosmopolitan character helped to enlarge the narrow outlook of Judaism. Antioch was the cradle of gentile Christianity and the early Christian missionary movement of the church. It is significant that Paul started each of his three missionary journeys from that center. Antioch offered a perfect setting for the battle to determine how binding the Jewish law would be on Jewish Christians.

It was at Antioch, where the gentile Christians would seem to have been in a majority, that the custom had been established that Jewish members of the congregation should join freely in fellowship with their gentile brethren in Christ. It was because of the nature and quality of this fellowship—Jews and gentiles eating at the same table, praying to the one God, calling on the name of Jesus, the believers manifesting their essential oneness with one another—that, according to Acts, this new fellowship received its name:—"And in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians (Acts 11:26b)."

So, when Peter came to Antioch, seeing for the first time a church with a large gentile membership, we can understand how, to a man who had baptized Cornelius, it seemed natural and right that Jewish and gentile Christians *should sit down together*. When Peter came to Antioch he stepped into an atmosphere which he had not known in Jerusalem. "Peter was eating with the Gentiles." The imperfect tense "was eating" (*sunesthien*) implies that he did this, not on a single occasion, but repeatedly or habitually.

Now, while Peter "ate with the Gentiles," "certain men came from James." And lo, they caught Peter eating with the gentiles!

James was the head of the church in Jerusalem, and we may take it that these men had come with his authority and approval, probably bearing letters of commendation from him. They had come to remind the Jewish members of the Antiochian congregation of the obligations which all true Jews, including Jewish Christians must observe in their dealing with gentiles.

Now, some Jews might welcome a "good" gentile to their own tables, where at least the rules about food could be observed; but the fear of pollution would keep a "good," strict Jew from accepting an invitation to dine with a gentile. Though the Jewish Christians had accepted Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes, there were nonetheless Jews who could not be disloyal to their past traditions, customs, mores, and way of life.

"But when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." *Hote de elthen, hupestellen kai aphorizen heauton . . .* "But when they came, he gradually drew back and separated himself . . ." The verb *hupostello* is used to indicate the drawing back of troops in order to place them under shelter—it suggests a retreat from motives of caution. The verb *aphorizo* means to exclude, to separate oneself, to hold aloof. *Heauton* is the object of both verbs, *hupostello* and *aphorizo*. The imperfect tense is very expressive, indicating that Peter took this step not at once, immediately on the arrival of the men from James, but gradually, under pressure. Lightfoot comments, "The words describe forcibly the cautious withdrawal of a timid person who shrinks from observation, *hupestellen* denoting the partial, *aphorizen*, the complete and final separation."<sup>3</sup>

Peter's lapse is quite intelligible. No other figure in the New Testament is better known to us. Honest, impulsive, ready of speech, full of contagious enthusiasm, brave as a lion, firm as a rock against open enemies, he possessed in high degree the qualities which mark a leader of men. He was of the stuff of which Christ makes his missionary heroes. But there was a strain of weakness in Peter's nature. *He was pliable*. He was too much at the mercy of his surroundings. His denial of Jesus set this native fault in a terribly vivid and humiliating light. And here again, this old fault comes to haunt him. Peter could not and did not stand up under the pressure. He is pathetic, pitiful, a slave to the presence of the men from James. He withdrew and separated himself. It is indeed unfortunate when a man, because of the legal restrictions, is forced into segregation. *But it is most tragic when a man segregates himself*.

And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity (Gal. 2:13).

*Hoste kai Barnabas sunapechthe auto te hupokrisei*. "And they joined him in the hypocrisy . . ." Hypocrisy is essentially in the concealment of one's real character under the guise of conduct implying something different (*hupokriesthai*, to answer from under; i.e., from under a mask as the actor did, playing a part), and it usually takes the form of concealing wrong feelings and character under the pretense of better ones. However, from Paul's point of view it was their better knowledge which they cloaked under a mask of worse knowledge, the usual type of hypocrisy which proceeds with fear. By the characterization of their conduct as *hypocrisy* Paul implies that there had been no real change of conviction on the part of Peter and the rest but only conduct which belied their real convictions.

The Jews, that is Jewish Christians, including Peter, were in reality convinced that Jesus Christ had made all those who believed in him alike righteous before God with themselves, and alike qualified to be admitted to the Christian fellowship. But now, by siding with those who treated their gentile brethren as more or less unclean, not fit for them to associate with, they disguised their real feelings and sentiments from "fear" of forfeiting the confidence and good will of those narrow-minded Jews.

Then Paul adds: "Even Barnabas was carried away." Personal regard mingles with anguish and apprehension as he tells how even Barnabas, his colleague and loyal supporter in so many phases of the work, had been carried away. Even Barnabas who so lately had gone up to protect the interest of the gentiles against the pressure of the Pharisaic brethren, "was carried away by their insincerity."

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned (Gal. 2:11).

It was a moral, not a doctrinal, aberration that Paul lays at the door of Peter and Barnabas. They did not hold a different creed from himself; they were disloyal to the common creed. They swerved from the path of rectitude in which they had previously walked. They had regarded no longer "the truth of the gospel"—the supreme consideration of the servant of Christ. They courted the favor of men and the public opinion of Jerusalem. "What will they say of us there in Jerusalem," they whispered to each other, "if these messengers of James report that we are discarding the sacred customs, our way of life, and making no difference between Jew and gentile? What will they say of us in Jerusalem if we Jews treat the gentiles as if they are our equals? We shall alienate our Judean brethren. We shall bring a scandal on the Christian cause in the eyes of Judaism. They will call us in Jerusalem 'gentile lovers'!"

This withdrawal of the Jews from the common fellowship of Antioch was a public matter. It was an injury to the whole gentile Christian community. If the reproof was to be effective, it must be equally public and explicit. The offense was notorious. Everyone deplored it except those who shared it or profited by it. Peter stood condemned. And yet his influence and the reverence felt toward him were so great that no one dared to put this condemnation into words. His sanction was of itself enough to give this sudden demonstration of Jewish bigotry the force of authoritative usage. "The truth of the gospel" was again in jeopardy. Once more Paul's intervention foiled the attempts of the Judaizers and saved the gentiles' liberties. And this time he stood quite alone. Even the faithful Barnabas deserted him. But what matter if Christ and truth were on his side? Alone, amid the circle of opposing or dissembling Jews,

Paul "withstood" the chief of the apostles of Jesus "to the face." Paul rebuked him, "before them all."

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all (Gal. 2:14a).

They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel—all *hote eidon hoti ouk orthopodousin pros ten aletheian* of the gospel. Paul's use of the verb *orthopodousi* is suggestive, in that it may mean straight, either vertically or horizontally. It may be either "walk uprightly," that is, "sincerely"; or "walk straight onward," that is, "rightly." Now, when Paul saw (1) the coming of the representatives of James, (2) the retreat of Peter from his first position, and (3) the action of the rest of the Jewish Christians, including Barnabas—he concluded that "they were not *orthopodousi*" about the truth of the gospel. Paul is saying that when he saw this he became aware of the deeper implication of this type of action, and the profound question that this action raised about the nature of the Christian fellowship. Possibly Paul saw for the first time how far the principles of the gospel that he preached must carry him in his anti-legalism. He saw for the first time that if the law was not binding on the gentile, neither could it be really binding on the Jew, and that when obedience to the law by both Jew and gentile became an obstacle in the way of the gospel, then both Jew and gentile must cease to obey its statutes.

The ethical implications of the verb *orthopodeo* should be noted. This is not simply a general ethical term for doing right, but as the context implies, it denotes a straightforward, unwavering, and sincere conduct in contrast with the pursuing of a crooked, wavering, and more or less insincere course, such as Paul attributes to Peter and those who followed him. The phrase "about the truth of the gospel" limits the verb *orthopodeo*, yielding the sense "pursue a straight course in relation to the truth of the gospel," or "to deal honestly and consistently with the gospel"—that is, not juggling or warping or misrepresenting the truth of the gospel!

When Paul saw this, he was stirred to his depths. He saw what was at stake in the behavior of Peter and the rest—*nothing less than the unity of the church and the truth of the gospel*. The action of Peter and the delegation from James Paul termed *hypocrisy* because he believed that on the fundamental issue of the unity of Jew and gentile in Christ, his two fellow apostles were one with him. What was wrong with Peter and the rest was that they were not acting in accordance with their deepest religious convictions.

Yes, the truth of the gospel was at stake, and Paul proceeded to remonstrate with Peter "before them all," because Peter "stood condemned"! Paul draws a contrast between the two ways of life—the

gentile and the Jewish—and he reminds Peter that when he first came to Antioch, he was ready, Jew though he was, to be guided in his action by the fact that *he was a Christian*. And because his conduct was determined by the fact that he was a *Christian*, Peter associated freely with gentiles who were his brethren in Christ. But when the delegation from James came in and looked on Peter, Peter drew back and separated himself from his gentile brethren in Christ. When Peter drew back, *race* determined his conduct toward his gentile brethren in Christ. Peter is confronted with the ruthless logic of Paul: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews (Gal. 2:14b)?" Now, when Peter ate with the gentiles, he had begun to live like the gentiles and not like the Jews. Paul retains this cynical language so as to add point to the argument that follows. "Then you were ready," he says in effect, "to forget that you were a Jew and to adopt what is called the gentile way of life." Why then (Paul drives home his point), now you do precisely the opposite and compel the gentiles to become Jews!

Peter's solution to this problem is underscored by his behavior. By his behavior, Peter is saying that in this matter of food, Jewish Christians have no desire to dictate to their gentile Christian brothers, but for themselves the Jews must remember that they have their customs, traditions, and way of life that they must not break. Therefore, let the gentile Christians keep their customs, and let the Jewish Christians keep theirs. Did Peter mean to hold that when the Christians gathered in solemn assembly around the "table of the Lord," there must be one table for Jews and another for the gentiles?

This, according to Paul, was no solution at all: It emptied the gospel of its truth and must, in the end, disrupt the Christian fellowship. In refusing to accept this division in the church Paul may have been influenced by what he knew of the stories of Jesus, who had defied religious tradition by eating with publicans and sinners. But Paul also saw how such a decision cut across the fundamental conception of the church as the redeemed family of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and would make impossible the development of the church as a living society. Paul saw, too, as Peter at the time did not see, that there were only two ways by which the unity of Jews and gentiles in Christ could be maintained: either Jewish Christians must, as Christians, transcend the prejudices and legal restrictions of Judaism when Christian fellowship so demanded, or else gentile Christians must conform to the ways of the Jews.

We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have be-

lied in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified (Gal. 2:15-16).

Paul's solution to this problem is that both Jews and gentiles become Christians. Paul is not content with pointing out the inconsistency of Peter: he must probe the matter to the bottom. He will bring Peter's delinquency to the very foundation of the Christian gospel. So in verse 15 he passes from the outward to the inward, from the circumstances of Peter's conduct to the inner world of spiritual consciousness in which his offense finds its deeper condemnation. We are not gentile sinners, says Paul, but men of Jewish birth. But even though we have come to Jesus Christ in different ways, yet in the essence of the matter, in respect of the personal conviction of sin, in the yielding of self-righteousness and Jewish pride, and in the throwing of ourselves on the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, our history has run the same course. "We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ." Justification is said to be "by faith." But it is not strictly faith that justifies, but the grace of God which faith lays hold of. It is impossible to find a better definition of what faith means to Paul than that offered by C. H. Dodd:

For Paul faith is that attitude in which, acknowledging our complete insufficiency for any of the high ends of life, we rely utterly on the sufficiency of God . . . . It is an act which is the negation of all activity, a moment of passivity out of which the strength of action comes, because in it God acts . . . a radical trust in God the All-sufficient, leaving no place for human merit of any kind.<sup>4</sup>

All men, both Jews and gentiles, stand in need of this grace of God. All men are on the same level; "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; the Jews with the divine law are sinners needing salvation as much as the gentiles outside the law. There is a gulf between us and God, and God himself has bridged the gulf in Jesus Christ. This is the saving action which God takes in favor of man. God grants man a favor which he can only receive. The spiritual attitude which makes reception possible is faith. Faith does nothing except to receive what is the gift of God. The hand of the beggar is empty, and because empty, useful; but to beg does not constitute a work: it is neither a merit nor a claim. The object of faith is God active in Jesus Christ, and when we commit ourselves wholly to Jesus Christ, God accepts us as we are, forgives our sins, and begins to transform us into his sons and daughters as we are meant to be. "Even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ."



For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19-20).

Paul can never forget what happened to him on the Damascus road—the moment when Christ called him and he responded. The old Paul died—was crucified with Christ. Paul, the persecutor of the Christians; Paul, the virtuous Pharisee who knew that his virtue was a hollow pretense; Paul, the godly rabbi who knew that his inner life was a travesty of what he professed in public. Paul can truly say, “I have been crucified with Christ!” So when Paul contrasted the persecutor that he had once been with the courageous apostle of Jesus Christ that he had now become, he could truly say, “the life I now live is not my life.” Something, someone, had come into his life, and whatever good he was able to do was done because Christ lived in him.

To be “crucified with Christ,” means (1) to be a participant in the grace of God so that one is willing to take on himself vicariously the sins of others, to create unity and harmony through and by one’s ministry of reconciliation, to consign one’s life to God and walk by faith where one cannot see; (2) to share the mind of Christ, to become involved in the fellowship of his sufferings, so that one shares the motives, the purposes, and the way of life that led Jesus to the cross; (3) to become a partner with Christ in his creative suffering, which requires that the Christian, through love and service, “complete what remains of Christ’s afflictions” for the sake of his body, the church. This must be the nature of the church’s life and existence in the world.

## THE IMPERATIVE OF BEYONDNESS

Beyondness is a unique dimension of the human spirit. It expresses a reaching beyond the point of arrival, a pull toward some mysterious future which has been born out of the womb of today, a call to some strange destiny to which and for which God has prepared a people. Our theme is "Beyond Blackness to Destiny." But why beyond blackness? Have we arrived at the point of blackness? And what is the newfound meaning of blackness which has emerged out of the black experience? What were the events, the causes, the circumstances that have thrown us into this present period of blackness? Why do we assume that beyond blackness there is a destiny and what is the nature of that destiny?

In order to interpret the theme correctly we will consider the following: (1) the new thrust for freedom and dignity, (2) interpretation of the meaning of the black experience, and (3) the black experience and the new destiny.

### I

The first point is the new thrust for freedom and dignity which must be interpreted in the light of the fact that white racism is the most explosive problem facing our nation today. White racism has deep roots in the American society. It has shaped and determined the form and structure of the basic institutions of this country—local and national government, judicial systems, schools, churches, and family life. We will never be able to deal with the great problem facing this nation until the problem of white racism is admitted to be the cancer eating away at the very heart of this nation.

By white racism I mean, first, the conscious belief in the inherent superiority of persons of European ancestry, especially those of northern European origin, which entitles these persons and all other white persons to a position of power, dominance, and special privilege by mere fact of skin color.

The second element in our definition of white racism is that all black people, especially those of African ancestry, are innately inferior, and this justifies the subordination and exploitation of the black man by the white man. The Dred-Scott Decision has shaped, deter-

mined, and given content to the mentality of the white man in this manner; namely, that the black man has no rights that a white man is compelled to respect.

White racism has deep and powerful roots in America, and the racial crisis is more serious than the threat of nuclear war. The revolt against white racism in our country is the most inflammatory element of the social revolution because it is being fought at the level of man's deepest emotion—the burning and universal passion for human dignity. The full impact of white racism in America cannot be fully realized until one takes into consideration that this racial ideology has been formally developed and institutionalized; a systematic body of thought has been formulated to justify it.

Those who deal with white racism purely from the legal aspect fail to take into account its cumulative effects. These effects are: the systematic destruction of family life and cultural unity; the ruthless assault on personality structure; the denial of manhood and womanhood; the disruption of family and community life; the crippling experience of exclusion from educational and technical training and employment; and the destruction of personality by the brutalized climate of force and violence designed to maintain racial structures intact.

The Blacks of this country used various methods and means to combat white racism—legal, political, moral, and educational. We note with admiration and a sense of indebtedness the significant works of W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, A. Phillip Randolph, Charles S. Johnson, and Mardica Johnson. We praise God for the excellent services rendered to the black youth of this nation by the black educational institutions in preparing these young Blacks so that they could take their place in the mainstream of American life.

Executive Order 8802 issued by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared, "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries of government." The Executive Order issued by President Truman stated, "The constitutional guarantee of individual liberties and of equal protection under the law clearly places on the federal government the duty to act when state or local authorities abridge or fail to protect these constitutional rights." These are some of the significant events and the contributions of outstanding persons which preceded this new thrust for freedom and human dignity.

But the most significant event which provided the way for the new thrust for freedom and human dignity was the Supreme Court decision outlawing school segregation in 1954. As you will remember, this decision was read by Chief Justice Earl Warren who wrote, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

When this decision was rendered, the American Negroes, the American Blacks, had won their greatest victory of the century. Down came the whole intricate and devious underpinning for the idea of segregation. Down came a century and half of tortuous rationalization supporting an untenable creed that the Negro was inherently inferior. Chief Justice Warren also stated, "To separate students solely because of their races generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." For the first time the psychological consequences of segregation were at least acknowledged and recognized by the highest court in the land. These are the events and these are the men who prepared the way for the new thrust for freedom and human dignity.

But the events which marked the inauguration of this new thrust for freedom and human dignity occurred in Montgomery, Alabama in the year 1955. A tired black woman by the name of Mrs. Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama got on a bus and refused to move from her seat. So began the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56 led by the martyr Martin Luther King, Jr. But the most significant aspect of this movement was that the civil rights movement was born. Mrs. Parks' refusal to yield her seat was an act of nonviolent resistance.

The ultimate goal of the nonviolent thrust of the late Dr. Martin Luther King was given when he said:

In the process of gaining our rightful place we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people for many of our white brothers have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.<sup>1</sup>

The climax of the nonviolent movement of Dr. King came in Washington, D. C. on August 28, 1963 when more than two hundred thousand persons participated in a march for jobs and freedom at the Lincoln Memorial one hundred years and eight months after the Emancipation Proclamation. In that moving address entitled "I Have a Dream," Dr. King stated:

We have come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of calling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the

quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.<sup>2</sup>

But in addition to this, Dr. King also warned this country: "There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundation of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges."

Following the assassinations of Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights Act passed the United States Senate on June 19, 1964, exactly one year after it had been presented to Congress. To be sure, there were compliances with the new Civil Rights Act, but in many places the Blacks found it impossible to exercise their newly-won right to register to vote. Diehard segregationists were quick to find loopholes, cause delay, set up obstructions. They brought suits to contest some of its provisions. Registration officials disqualified Blacks on the flimsiest excuses or they changed the time and place of registration without notice. In Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, Negroes were intimidated and terrorized. A voter education campaign was enacted by the leading civil rights organizations. The job of the volunteers was to teach Negroes what their voting rights were and how to exercise them. The apprehension that this plan generated in some parts of this country was justified. Though the project could count a thousand new Negro registrants and the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, many of the volunteers were beaten by gangs of white private citizens and police. Many more were arrested. Sixty-five churches and homes where volunteers gathered were burned or bombed. At least six people were murdered.

Many Negroes were beginning to be disillusioned with nonviolence and even an address delivered by the late Dr. King early in 1968 indicated that he, too, had a deep concern as to whether or not the nonviolent techniques were working in this American society. King declared, "The fact is inescapable that the tactics of nonviolence, which had then dominated the thinking of the Civil Rights Movement, has in the last two years not been playing its transforming role."<sup>3</sup> In the same address, King also pointed out that there was a need for a new kind of nonviolence, which he described as "militant nonviolence." This militant nonviolence is pressure. King stated:

We need to put pressure on Congress to get things done. We will do this with First Amendment activities. If Congress is unresponsive we will have to escalate in order to keep the issue alive and before it. This action may take on disruptive dimension but not violent in the sense of destroying life and property. And it will be militant non-violence.<sup>4</sup>

Early in 1965 there was a restless stirring within the black community. The feeling grew that the demonstrations and nonviolence were not working. "You can only sing 'We Shall Overcome' so many times," a young Black said, "before you realize that it is not the way to overcome." The center of the black man's struggle was moving North where the ghettos were, where Blacks could easily see the white world that was still denied them—fertile ground for the rise of militance. The day of peaceable marches beginning at center block southern churches and ending in damp southern jails was past.

In northern cities black patiences were wearing thin and frustration was reaching the boiling point. The larger problem had always lain in the North, ignored by most Whites who paid only lip service to the ideal of equality. Therefore, there emerged on the American scene and in the black community new leaders with new methods and new techniques. With a few minor exceptions every legal safeguard that could be enacted had been enacted. But residential segregation was in fact in most of the North. Job discrimination remained pervasive. Negro poverty was severe. De facto school segregation was common. Despite the entry of Blacks into such formerly all white preserves as the Senate, the Cabinet, and the Supreme Court, there was a widespread feeling of powerlessness and the average black man saw little change in his daily life. Out of the wash of frustration came the black nationalism of Malcolm X, the Black Power of Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown; the emphasis on blackness, on soul food and African hairstyle, on black history and culture.

So the first stage in the quest for freedom and human dignity has come to an end and we now enter the second stage; and the leader and the hero of this second stage is Malcolm X. Malcolm X was murdered in 1965, and the black community immediately made him a saint.

## II

With the death of Malcolm X, the Blacks of this country saw history as beginning just yesterday. To confront the white man in this country was another urban ghetto-bred generation—Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Ron Karenga, Nathan Wright, James Forman, Jesse Gray, and others who provided leadership and inspiration for the nameless hosts of the despairing, frustrated, deprived, and despised black men in this country.

The President's Commission on Civil Disorders indicated that in this country there are two societies: one society white, rich, and affluent; the other society black and poor. This commission also reported that racism operates with the same deadly force in the life

of the Black in the North as in the South. In the North you do have educational inequality, poverty, social instability; and these are hidden under the pretense of political liberalism. The black man is excluded from the power structures in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago. The Kerner Report tried to make this clear to millions of Whites but the new young black protestors were born with this knowledge. It does not matter to them that the basic problems of poverty, ignorance, crime, sickness, and old age are not exclusively racial. It does not matter that in absolute terms there are more poor, deprived, and exploited Whites than Blacks. What does matter is that Whites, all Whites, have their whiteness going for them, and that Blacks, all Blacks, have their blackness going against them. What matters is that poor Whites with gumption can claw away at the power structure, can have a say, can choose, can have a yea or nay, while Blacks with no matter how much gumption, remain outside and in the final showdown have their lives controlled by the white man's whim. So "Black Power now!" the protestors cry.

Black Power means different things to different people. To some it means separatism, that integration cannot work. To some it means an assertion of pride expressed by the phrases "Black is beautiful" or "I'm black and I'm proud." To many black intellectuals it means the competitive development of black institutions—political, educational, and social—so strong, viable, and effective that Whites will have to reckon with them, cooperate with them, and in the millenium of integration, join them. Black Power is revealed not as violence which destroys, nor even as suffering which endures, but as truth which resists injustices and lifts people from the level of objects to that of persons. The new theme is "Learn, Baby, Learn!"

The new Black embraced his blackness and gave thanks to God for the black experience. He affirmed himself, and his blackness is no longer a burden to him, but rather a gift of God. Blackness is for him a life which is characterized by universal thrust. Blackness represents a man's commitments, his beliefs, his ideologies.

### III

The black experience is the womb out of which the new destiny is created. The black experience is God's new creation which produces the new man and the new community and it points to the destiny which lies on the other side of blackness. Out of the black experience has emerged a new conception of love and the development of the new man. At a forum held in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1966 one participant said that one of the difficulties in Dr. King's understanding of love was that "Martin King was trying to get us to love white folks before we learned to love ourselves and that ain't good."

In the black experience the black man has discovered the necessity of self-love and he recognizes that healthy self-esteem is a prerequisite for the establishment of the true community. Certainly one will remember the teachings of Jesus on this matter in which he urged his followers to love his neighbor as himself. The black experience is a call for black self-love and it teaches us that love, like charity, must begin at home. Such a love must begin with ourselves, our beautiful, black selves. So rich and full is this new understanding of love which has emerged out of the black experience that this love will not settle for anything short of love in return. As one of the interpreters of the black experience asserts, "profound love can only exist between equals." This is the love which pervades the black community, and Stokely Carmichael has reminded us that we can build a community of love only where we have the ability and power to do so.

The establishment of the new community necessitates the ungirding of that community with this understanding of love. Love becomes the necessary foundation for its structure. There was a time in the history of the black man in which he sought to become like the dominant Whites. He was ashamed of his heritage—and this was due to the fact that he did not know his heritage, and he attempted to whitenize his style of life. In a profound sense, the black man wanted to become white. He discovered that this was an impossible conversion and he has seen beauty, truth, and goodness emerge out of his own experience—the black experience—and on that experience he seeks to build a beloved community. He accepts the fact that blackness is for him an inescapable reality and he celebrates those unique things which separate him from the white man. Some may say that such a community falls short of the universal community, but one must remember that the black man in America has been encouraged to disdain his community no less than himself. The call for the establishment of the black community, the true community, is the beginning of true corporate health and integrity. The creation of the new community demands identification with other Blacks. It means the establishment of a true brotherhood based upon a common experience. No longer is the black man ashamed that he was born in a ghetto in the North or on a poverty-stricken farm in the South. The ghetto child realizes that what happens in the ghetto happens to him and the black intellectual recognizes that what happens to a black man in a small hamlet in the South literally happens to him. Our destiny demands that we identify not only with the black community, but also with mankind at large. What we have learned from painful experience is that before we can learn to identify with mankind at large, we must learn to identify with our own black neighbors.



## IV

The movement from the black community to the universal community is a logical and inescapable part of the process. This was the experience of Jesus and Paul. Jesus of Nazareth had first to explore the most profound levels of his own culture both physically and spiritually before he was able to transcend it. Paul was required to apprehend the things which were part of his own racial and cultural heritage before he could move out and participate in the universal community. Our destiny, therefore, is one of showing to the world the healthy possibility for the creation of the true religious community. It suggests the destruction of all the caste and the class distinctions within the Afro-American community. It encourages the discovery of roots long buried and rejected. It insists that men be true to themselves. It causes a broken black people to see its own black section of the mainland. It reveals the gifts of a man who was once the scorned member of the black body. It was Karenga who shouted, "Until Blacks develop themselves they can do nothing for humanity." What is suggested here is that men must not only love themselves in order to love their neighbor, but they must love their community in order to love the world.

The black experience teaches us that not only must we identify ourselves with the Blacks of the world, but also with the wretched nonwhites of the world. We must remember that our blackness links us with the Indians of Peru, the miners in Bolivia, the Africans and the freedom fighters in Vietnam. What they fight for is what the black man in America fights for—the right to govern his own life. This is the new universalism which is based on suffering, struggle, survival, and hope.

To fulfill this destiny, God working through the black experience has well-equipped us. God has given us the gift of faith. As we examine the shape of the black experience in America, we realize that the black man would not be in existence today were it not for this gift of faith.

The gift of faith is proclaimed in our hymns and spirituals and it is articulated in our language, it rings out in our laughter and is rhythmized in our dances. We have discovered this faith in the depth of our suffering and it has given meaning and glory to our existence.

This faith has given us the capacity to endure hopelessness and to produce a literature and to create songs. This faith should throw us back into a tough world, "where cross the crowded ways of life" and in "haunts of wretchedness and need."

Our mission is "to complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body." Let us enter into the struggle that Jesus

did not complete; the struggle for the children, the poor and down-pressed. Let us continue the struggle for the humiliated and the struggle for the weak. Let us continue his ministry in bringing comfort to those who mourn and a message of deliverance for the captive. Let us serve those who have been pushed to the limits of human existence, those for whom the world has made no provisions. Let us join Jesus Christ, the ghetto-bred lad of Nazareth, the God-intoxicated swinger of Galilee. When we join him in this struggle we confess that he knew what he was talking about when he said that those who are filled with compassion have good news for the poor, bring sight to the blind and healing for the broken victims of the world. As we go to fulfill our destiny, let us go singing:

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on our way;  
Thou who has by thy might, led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path we pray—  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God where we met  
thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget  
thee;  
Shadowed beneath thy hand, May we forever stand,  
True to our God, true to our native land.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

There are two conditions which make an analysis and an interpretation of the Christian faith and the black experience necessary. Today the Christian faith as it is expressed in the major denominations of the country is under severe attack. There are those who contend that it is highly irrelevant and has no real word to say to modern man who is caught up in the complexities of modern civilization. Second, the value of the black experience and its legitimacy is now acknowledged by many members of both black and white communities, but for different reasons. Black Americans, because of the events of the past ten years, have been forced to reexamine their own attitudes toward the black experience and have drawn from this experience strength and new insight concerning their own worth and contribution to world culture and civilization. The white community has been forced to admit that the presentation of the history of the black man in America has been partial, incomplete, and slanted. Any interpretation of this black experience must take into consideration the influences and effects of the Christian faith, and how this faith partially shaped and molded the black experience.

This essay will concern itself with an analysis of this problem.

### THE FAITH DELIVERED—WHAT IT IS

Jesus Christ was believed by the early witnessing community to be God's final and decisive revelation to man. God in the New Testament is defined in terms of his revelation in Jesus Christ—"God, the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." Men saw God and felt his presence in the person, word, spirit, life, and deed of Jesus Christ. This belief in Jesus Christ as God's revelation to the world and to men became the nucleus around which the Christian community developed, and the source of ideas about life and ultimate reality.

Participants in the Christian community shared certain basic convictions. There was first the conviction of faith—and this faith expressed itself in the belief that at the end of these days God had spoken to men through his Son. Believers of the early Christian

community were convinced that their faith was grounded in God, the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and because of this belief, the world, life, and death took on new meanings.

The Christian faith required a new kind of living. The source for this new living was present to the community in the spirit of Jesus Christ who was both the community's ideal and the source of its power. The Christian faith required a new way of living with God, in which reverence, adoration, and devotion were joined with the love and trust of sons living in fellowship with God. It meant a new way of living with men as men in which the spirit of goodwill, concern, and mutual love determined and motivated behavior.

The Christian faith made possible a new life—a life which was both a gift of God and a task which the believers of the Christian community willingly accepted. It was a community of redeemed men and women. Members of this community attempted to introduce others to make them sharers of this new God-given life. Jesus brought to this community not simply new ideals or ideas, but new life. The members of the early Christian community experienced this new life in many different ways. First, Jesus brought them into a fellowship with God which of itself was the power of a new life. Second, this new life came to them as a new spirit which sprang up in each believer. This new life made possible a new fellowship and this new fellowship had as its center a common Lord, a common faith, a common task, a common hope, and a common spirit of goodwill.

The Christian faith is reflected in the life of the believers as the ongoing life of that fellowship which originated with Jesus and seeks its motivation, inspiration, and guidance in him. It finds through Jesus Christ the God of its faith, the goal of its hope, and the new way of life. This Christian fellowship becomes an exhibition of redemptive love.

We must examine the new emphasis and the new insights which believers of the early Christian community received about the nature of God. God for this community was the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus' ideas of God were determined and molded by the insights which he had received from the great Hebrew prophets. These Hebrew prophets found their clue to the nature of God in terms of justice and mercy. So Jesus finds his clue in human fatherhood and the Christian community in the Spirit revealed in a human life—Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' idea of God was ethical and personal. God is the supreme reality for Jesus; God is creative power, shaping purpose, directing providence, and redeeming love. God, for Jesus, is the source for the power and love required to perfect human life.

The early Christian community was not only aware of the meaning of the life of Jesus Christ for one's understanding of the nature

of God, but they were also cognizant of what Jesus did to their understanding of religion. Jesus gave to the world a religion of the spirit. He confronted men with a religion that was ethical through and through. The God of Jesus was ethical; not abstract power, but righteousness and love. Fellowship with this God was ethical. Its supreme demand was that men would share the Father's spirit of goodwill.

Jesus made religion universal and this universalism was grounded on his idea of God. Jesus dared to believe that the highest that man knows is supreme in the universe and that man must live in the light of that highest. God, for Jesus, was transcendent in power and goodness, calling men to reverence and obedience. God was immanent as the ever-present working God of redeeming love, calling men to trust and surrender. God is personal and man may have fellowship with him and yet the center of the Christian faith is not man but rather God revealed in Jesus Christ. God is the goodness that summons to obedience, the voice that calls to achievement, the love that suffers and is victorious.

The Christian community whose life centered around Jesus Christ came to a new understanding about the nature of man. Sharers and embracers of the Christian faith were always aware of the demands of this faith in that it required of all of its members to transcend all social, racial, economic, and political barriers. Jesus believed that every man in his truest nature and in the intention of God was a son of God. Therefore, every man was sacred as man. Jesus believed in men in his reverence for humanity, in his passion, justice, in his faith in men, in his summons to a common service. He is the deepest spring and the ultimate source of the highest idealism of our day. Jesus held up before men the goal for human life. He offered fulfillment for all the needs and hopes of men. He confronted men with a social hope—the kingdom of God—and he included and made available to men a life which is victorious over death. Such was and is, in essence, the Christian faith.

Now to be sure, this interpretation of the meaning of the Christian faith was never proclaimed to black Americans prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. Black Americans before the emancipation were in a large measure presented a Christian faith which was tailored and corrupt to suit the purposes of the slave masters. Nevertheless in the providence of God, the black Americans sensed even at this period the other hidden ideas of the Christian faith and therefore they embraced it.

## **THE FAITH APPROPRIATED AND INTERPRETED**

The Christian faith may be spoken of or defined in two contrasted ways. On the one hand, the Christian faith is an objective external fact whether accepted or rejected. There it stands as a message to

mankind through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Christian faith as a fact has been given various names by the writers of the New Testament. Some writers call it the "everlasting gospel," "the gospel of God," "the gospel of Jesus Christ," "the word of the cross," and "the message of the crucified one."

The gospel as an objective fact has been called the kerygma—the message of salvation. C. H. Dodd<sup>1</sup> and A. M. Hunter<sup>2</sup> have described this aspect of the gospel as, "the facts of the gospel." They may differ as to the number of facts which make up the kerygma but they are in agreement in designating these events as facts. According to Hunter, the facts of the kerygma consist of the setting forth of at least three events. These events are interpretations of the fact; namely, the meaning and significance which the early Christian preachers attached to and discovered in the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There was first a claim that the message was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Second, there was a historical exposition setting forth Jesus in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. This exposition took the following form: Jesus, the promised Savior of the new age now dawning was born of David's line; he went about doing good by mighty works and deeds in Galilee and Judea; he was crucified on the cross according to the purposes of God; he was raised by God's power from the dead, exalted to God's right hand and he will come again as Savior and Judge. Third, there is a summons to repent and accept forgiveness of sins. This is the kerygma—the so-called accepted facts of the Christian faith.

There is another way in which the Christian faith may be designated. It may be referred to as "my gospel" or "according to my gospel." We have in the New Testament, the Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark, the Gospel according to Luke, and the Gospel according to John. The four writers of the Gospels were confronted with so-called objective facts of the Christian faith. When these facts were appropriated by the writers of the four Gospels, the Christian faith and gospel remained in its essence the faith and the gospel but it became the faith and the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each writer of the four Gospels was encountered by the person of the same Jesus Christ and in the appropriation and assimilation of this revelation, they present their own understanding of the nature of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Most simply stated, Jesus, for Matthew, is the great Teacher, the new Moses; for Mark, the strong Son of God; for Luke, the great Physician; and for John, the Logos or Liberator.

When the Christian faith came into the minds of the writers of the four Gospels, like the ocean flowing into four different channels,

it took the contours of their minds and experiences and not only did something profound happen to the writers of those Gospels, but something profoundly important happened to the gospel. The Christian faith became for each one of these writers the faith as it took shape in them. They were able to appropriate it and make it applicable to their lives so that each writer could say, "This is the faith, the Christian faith or the 'gospel according to me.'"

To be sure this was Paul's experience. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

According to Paul these were the objective facts of Christian faith which he received. When Paul appropriated, assimilated, and digested this gospel, something wonderful happened to Paul—he became an ambassador of Christ, the new creation. But something also profound happened to the faith; namely, it became the faith for Paul—Paul's faith and indeed he could say, "my faith" or "my gospel." On the one side, Paul was confronted with the objective facts of the Christian faith; on the other side, when he assimilated and appropriated the faith, he discovered that which was in the faith which became real to and for him. The faith got next to him and made a difference to him so that it became "my gospel" or "my faith." So, in the New Testament there are many expressions of the faith. There is "Pauline faith," "Johannine faith," "gentile faith," the "faith of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews"—all expressing what happened to the faith when the faith passed through the contours of the minds, hearts, and souls of those who appropriated the faith.

The objective facts of the Christian faith on the one hand and the appropriation of this faith on the other hand represent the dual function whenever the faith becomes meaningful to any individual or to any group. This was the same experience expressed in the life of black Americans when they were first confronted with the objective facts of the Christian faith. The faith was appropriated, assimilated, and used, and it becomes our task now to describe what happened to the black Americans who appropriated the faith and what happened to the faith that was appropriated.

## THE FAITH AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

In 1619 a Dutch vessel landed nineteen or twenty African natives at Jamestown, Virginia. They were immediately purchased by the colonial settlers and this marked the beginning of one of the most damnable institutions—"that peculiar institution"—ever contrived by the perverted mind of man. The slaves who were brought to these American shores like cattle came from various localities in Africa. They did not all speak the same language or dialect. They were cut off from the familiar surroundings of their native land, scattered and separated without regard to their tribal traditions. They had to adjust themselves to a completely alien civilization. They were forced to learn a strange language, adopt new customs, and were cast into new situations. They were subjected to the most brutal treatment ever experienced by any racial group since the dawn of creation. These black slaves were cut off from their rich African heritage; their spirits were broken, and they were made to think of themselves as worthless descendants from a race of savages.

No hope was offered to them for the future. They were mated like cattle and sold like personal property. They were absolutely under the control of the whims of their masters. They were subjected to frightful barbarities without redress. John Hope Franklin describes one of the many punishments to which the slaves were subjected. He writes: "Another favorite punishment was to suspend the slave from a tree by ropes and tie iron weights around his neck and waist. Still another was to crop the slave's ears and to break the bones of his limbs."<sup>3</sup> Those who attempted to secure their freedom were subjected to a form of torture which is beyond the wildest imagination. Franklin describes this cruel execution:

Their arms, thighs, legs, and backbones were broken with clubs on a scaffold. They were fastened round a wheel in such a manner that their face was turned upward to receive the full glare of the sun. The judge ordered that, "Here they are to remain for so long as it shall please God to preserve them alive," after which their heads were to be cut off and exposed on tall poles.<sup>4</sup>

DuBois notes that it is difficult for one to imagine what slavery was like. "It was oppression beyond all conception; cruelty which defies description, degradation, whipping and starvation and the absolute negation of human rights. It was the helplessness and the defenselessness of family life. It involved the absolute negation and destruction of human personality."<sup>5</sup>

Possibly the most moving illustration of what it meant to be a slave is recorded in the autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson, "Fugitive Slave." Henson tells about when he was offered for sale to



a group of purchasers.<sup>6</sup> He related how his mother half-distracted with the thought of parting forever from all her children, pushed through the crowd while the bidding for him was going on, to the spot where Riley was standing:

She fell at his feet, clung to his knees, entreating him in tones that a mother only could command, to buy her baby as well as herself, and spare to her one, at least, of her little ones. Will it, can it be believed that this man, thus appealed to, was capable not merely of turning a deaf ear to her supplication, but of disengaging himself from her with such violent blows and kicks, as to reduce her to the necessity of creeping out of his reach and mingling the groan of bodily suffering with the sob of a breaking heart? As she crawled away from the brutal man, I heard her sob out, "Oh, Lord Jesus, how long shall I suffer this way?" I must have been then between five and six years old.

Nearly four million slaves existed in America during the year 1860, and despite what they had been taught by their masters, they brought to this country a noble heritage and were endowed with many gifts of mind and spirit. They were endowed by God with native musical instincts and talents. They possessed a civilization, culture, and a body of folk literature, rich and varied. They were acquainted with art and remembered the drums and the African music. The African chants could be heard on the plantations. The deep groans of their oppressed souls were expressed by and through musical incantations. Their moans for the dead and the anguish experienced in living were rounded out in musical notes, thereby giving release to their own spirits.

The question must be asked. What were the causes which moved the black slave beyond his primitive mystic to the creation of a new type and kind of musical expression? Why did he not continue the beating out of the complex rhythm on tom-toms and drums while he uttered his cries of desperation and hopelessness? I believe that at the precise time, the psychological time, there was fused into the vestiges of the slaves' African music the spirit of Christian faith. They had been introduced to the Christian faith though in a perverted form by their masters. And this Christian faith though imperfectly presented was discovered to be, by the slaves, the precise religion for the conditions in which they found themselves. Far from their native land, customs, and traditions; despised, brutalized, degraded, and slaughtered by those among whom they lived; separated from their loved ones on the auction block, experiencing the cruelty and the unmercifulness of a psychotic slave master, the slaves embraced the Christian faith and interpreted it to be a religion of compensation in the life to come for the ills which they

had experienced here. The Christian faith was for the slaves a religion of reversals of conditions of the rich and poor, the proud and meek, of master and slave. It was this interpretation of the Christian faith which produced a body of songs which gave voice to all of the basic virtues of the Christian faith—faith, hope, love, courage, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, freedom, emancipation, liberation, victory. The black slaves took refuge in the Christian faith.

Previously we have indicated that there are two aspects to the Christian faith: the Christian faith as objective fact and the Christian faith as subjective appropriation. When the faith is appropriated by a group, something happens to the faith, on the one hand, and something happens to the group. Here we are concerned with seeking to discover what happened to the faith and what form of expression did the faith take when it was appropriated by more than three million Blacks.

One thing is certain; namely, that there would have been no black spirituals without the slaves' appropriation of the Christian faith. It is interesting, however, to look at the people—the black Americans who produced the black spirituals which possess such majestic grandeur. This music, the black spiritual, is a miracle and one has only to listen to the moving words of "Deep River," "Steal Away to Jesus," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" to be moved to the depths. The Christian faith provided the ideas and the slaves' existence afforded the occasion for the creation of the black spirituals. The black spirituals are songs of liberation. They express faith in God the All-sufficient One who saved Daniel from the lions' den, preserved the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, and liberated the Jews out of bondage in Egypt. The slaves thought that God the All-sufficient One would set them free. It was this faith that enabled the slaves to survive physically and spiritually the two hundred fifty years of slavery. The African chants were now metamorphosized into the black spirituals and out of this metamorphosis a new melody arose, a new song—"Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land and tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go."

It is difficult to ascertain with any degree of accuracy whether the black spirituals produced the black church and the black preacher, or if the black spirituals form the matrix out of which the black church and the black preacher emerged. A serious study of the available sources suggests that the emergence of the black spirituals, black preacher, and black church may have been a simultaneous movement—or three expressions of one basic desire for liberation and human dignity. The black preacher emerged and was immediately thrown into the arena of the struggles and hopes of his people. With the word of God, native gifts, and dedication he

preached as did the prophets of the Old Testament with the feeling that the hand of God was upon him. His style, manner of delivery, homiletics, and biblical expositions were hammered out and determined by the situation in which he functioned.

The black spirituals required group participation under the direction of a leader. The movement from the leader to the preacher was indeed an easy transition. In the group singing, the leader would usually sing the first line. He probably would make some observations about the spiritual which was to be sung; its meanings and declarations about faith in God and the freedom desired. The leader probably became the preacher.

The early black preacher was primarily the preacher of the word. His messages were determined by the reality of death, the difficulties of life, and the saving word which he discovered in the Bible. His ultimate purpose was one of bringing healing and liberation to a despised and depressed people who were exposed to the vast ambiguities of life. He sought by the word of God to bring healing and liberation to the broken personhood of black men and women whose lives had been disrupted and degraded by slavery. The black preacher confronted the black witnessing community with the glorious promises of the gospel, its joys, hopes, victories, confidences. He entered into the world and was part of that world—the world of his black brothers—to show them what he had learned about eternity and beauty in his preaching. The whole man was acting and reacting under the stimulus offered by the spiritual needs of the black witnessing community. The black preacher stood midway between the inexhaustible storehouse of spiritual dynamics and the depleted lives of his black brothers and shouted, "Walk together, children, don't you get weary," or moaned, "There's a balm in Gilead."

The black preacher was an interpreter of the black experience. He interpreted it in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and thereby provided the moral dynamics for living. He believed that even though the black people had suffered, there was the conviction that God had brought them to this country for a divine mission to become in a real and profound sense, the people of God, the medium of God's new revelation, the proclaimers of his loving mercy to a decadent and morally corrupted society.

Freedom and liberation run through the black spirituals and through the sermons and expositions of the early black preacher. He was a fighter for freedom and permitted himself to be used as the instrument for the new forces of liberation which were being manifested in the world. He was the living organ through which the desires, hopes, and aspirations of his people were expressed. Armed with the word of God and his physical body, the early black

preacher attacked the bastions of injustice, inhumanity, cruelty, and oppression. With the word of God, he proclaimed the coming of a brighter day when his black brothers and sisters would be free and free indeed. He challenged the power structures of his day and he carried a message of hope and faith, knowing and believing that eventually the will of God would be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

It is difficult for us today to understand the contributions of the early black church to members of the witnessing black community. The church was a place where the people gathered and there was an outpouring of souls, minds, and hearts in devotion to God. The emotional atmosphere was most pronounced. The members of the church felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and through the operations of this Spirit a psychological and religious outlet for crushed emotions and distorted feelings was provided. The church was a meeting place, it was a place in which the Blacks gathered to have their empty cups refilled, spirits revived, souls renewed so that they would be able to stand the onslaughts of a decadent and sick society in which they lived. Such was the character of the early black preacher and the early black church. The black Christian experience was expressed through these three mediums: the black spirituals, the black preacher, and the black church.

One wonders why this new, original, and novel interpretation of the Christian faith was not appreciated, recognized, and embraced by the white church establishment and the theological schools of this nation. The black church was a unique expression of the Christian fellowship in that it provided sustaining and supporting forces for the constituents. The black spirituals have been called a miracle of artistic and religious production. The black preacher exemplified in his delivery and interpretation of the Christian faith, emphasizes that which had been neglected by the so-called legitimate interpreters of the faith—human dignity, freedom, liberation, and courage.

This new and fresh interpretation of the Christian faith which came out of the life and witness of the black community was more or less overlooked, ignored, and judged illegitimate and subhuman by the white establishment of this nation. The reasons for this judgment of the white establishment are rather obvious. To elevate and articulate the black Christian experience by white theological technicians would have inevitably resulted in the elevation and appreciation of the black Americans who produced this new interpretation of the Christian faith. It would further have meant that the black man in America would have to be glorified culturally and elevated socially and economically. The black preacher and the black community would have to be accepted on a new level. The white American cultural ego would not permit this. America had al-

ready said that the Blacks were subhuman, three fifths of a man, and to admit that out of this group could come this unique interpretation of the Christian faith would take the foundation from under the judgment which was already reached. At the very bottom of this, one will discover the realities and depth of a racism. It is a racism which expresses itself in oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and segregation; all geared to support the false ideology of white supremacy.

The second reason why this unique contribution of the black Christian witnessing community was not embraced is to be found in the erroneous idea of "integration" which was offered to black Americans. The idea of "integration" which was projected by white America and offered to black Americans overlooked how integration had been achieved by other racial groups which made up this so-called American melting pot. America is made up of many racial and ethnic groups—European, African, Indian. Ethnic groups—Italian, Jewish, Irish, Japanese, were permitted to enter into the stream of American life and thought, bringing with them their ethnic characteristics, traditions, customs, mannerisms, and ways of life. That is, in order for the Irish to enter into the mainstream of American life, they were not forced to deny their ethnic characteristics, history, culture, and traditions. These were accepted and became part of the so-called melting pot of America.

However, in the case of black Americans the price for "integration" was indeed high and costly. The white American's image was placed before black Americans as the ideal. If black Americans could become like this white American ideal which meant denying their ethnic characteristics, traditions, history, culture, and God-given native gifts, they would be "admitted" into the mainstream of American life and thought. Blacks were expected to imitate the white ideal. Integration on terms of the white man in America involved nothing less than the absolute destruction of the personhood of black Americans in that it demanded of them something that they could never accomplish; namely, to become white.

## **BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE BLACK CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

The new understanding of the Christian faith emerged out of the black Christian witnessing community. Theology implies participation in the Christian community, so that experience in the life of faith precedes theology. One's experience of the life of faith comes from participation in the community of faith and the form of this experience will vary widely, depending on what the racial group brings to the faith. This is possibly what William James had in mind when he spoke about the "varieties of religious experi-

ence." Whatever theology arose out of the black witnessing community must be defined in terms of Jesus Christ who is the center and the norm of all religious striving. The community produces the data to be used by the theologian in the development of his theological system. The question of the name for this theology is rather interesting because in the religious experience of any other racial group, the naming of that theology developed is in most instances a moot issue. To be sure, the theology which developed out of the black Christian experience is Christian precisely because the faith which the witnessing community expressed centered around Jesus Christ and was determined by his spirit. The theology is Christian but another term is needed if one is to define or classify this distinctive theology which emerged out of the black witnessing community. By no stretching of the imagination can this theology be called English theology, German theology, continental theology, Japanese theology, or even American theology. There is but one name to give it: *black theology*. It is a theology which has emerged out of the experiences of black men—black men who were committed to Christian faith and who brought to the Christian faith the totality of their experiences, accepted this Christian faith, and when this Christian faith flowed through the contours of their souls a new interpretation of this faith emerged.

Some black and white scholars deny the legitimacy of a black theological discipline but readily embrace German theology, British theology, continental theology, and white American theology. When black and white scholars are asked why they embrace German theology they answer readily that the German scholars have a definite methodology, canons, criteria, and approaches and that the Germans' experience provides the milieu or the fellowship out of which all German theology emerges. These scholars point with pride to the works of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack. They are informed and stimulated by the works in New Testament of such German scholars as Bultmann and Bornkamm. Further, these scholars admit also that there is "white American theology," and they insist that there are several traditions or histories which have shaped white American theological thought: the tradition of supernaturalism, the tradition of idealism, the tradition of romanticism, the tradition of naturalism, and the tradition of existentialism. Black scholars have embraced the teachings of white theological technicians like Albert C. Knudson, E. S. Brightman, Eugene W. Lyman, William Adams Brown, Edward Schribner Ames, Paul Tillich, William F. Hocking, Henry Nelson Wieman, and Reinhold Niebuhr. The black and white scholars who repudiate the concept of black theology embrace the theologies which have arisen out of other racial Christian experiences.

The difficulties which most people have with the phrase black theology is conditioned by their understanding of the word *black*. The rejection of blackness is so deeply rooted in the black man's experience in this nation that anything associated with the term black provokes a negativism, a refusal which is instantaneous and final. To these black scholars, or they may prefer to be called scholars, the word black has a sinister meaning. For them, the term black means evil, erroneous, devilish, malicious, suspicious, crafty, ignorant, sinful, and ugly. Blackness for many Negroes is a symbol for that which this American culture seeks to destroy and therefore it has no place in a society which is dominated by the concept white or whiteness.

In order for us to appreciate and understand the phrase black theology we must give the word blackness a new content and meaning—a content and meaning which has arisen out of the glorious black Christian experience.

Mari Evans has presented a definition of blackness as a political/cultural concept. She writes:

Blackness is a political/cultural concept. It recognizes man's need for a knowledge of where he has been in order to determine where he must go. It affirms an identity that is African in root, understanding that an infusion of European /Asiatic strains has possibly expanded but certainly not destroyed the basic African identity.

Blackness is a political/cultural concept called "revolutionary" by the oppressor, defines the nature of his oppressionistic acts and frees the minds of the oppressed.

Blackness is a political/cultural concept which calls the individual to view the nobility of his ancestral civilizations, the tragedy of his slave/castration involvement with America, and the magnificence of his courage under oppressive odds, with the understanding that this is where he has been. Where he goes now becomes his major consideration and how he must go, his most pressing business.<sup>7</sup>

However, the term blackness is more than a political/cultural concept. Blackness is an ontological-philosophical-theological concept. It is ontological in the sense that it affirms the existence of the black man as a legitimate and significant part of a God-given humanity to which all other races belong. Blackness is a philosophical concept in the sense that it requires a critical examination of fundamental ideas about God, world, man, good, and evil which have arisen out of the black Christian experience. Blackness is a theological concept in that it affirms with the Hebraic-Christian tradition that all of God's creation is good and may be used by God for the revelation of his will, mind, purpose, and love in the world. Blackness represents a man's commitments, his beliefs, his ideologies.

If blackness is embraced with this positive content as a political/cultural-ontological/philosophical/theological concept, the legitimacy of the use of the term black with the term theology is established.

The Commission on Theology of the National Committee of Black Churchmen declared that, "All theologies arise out of the communal experience with God." The black Christian experience which we elucidated is the communal experience which provides the data for black theological reflection. The black Christian experience is a historical episode embodying a way of thinking, the molding of theological concepts, shaping an attitude toward life which is peculiar to the black man's experience. Professor Wieman was conscious of this many years ago when he wrote:

The historical episodes of reaction in the history of thought are the expressions of a more deeply persistent phenomenon: namely, the temperamental differences in human nature, arising out of socio-physical conditions affecting the thinking organism. Much as we may seek to make thinking objective and purely logical, we never succeed fully in escaping the human equation. For thinking involves responding to stimuli. And responding to stimuli demands sensitivity to stimuli. It is here that the human equation asserts itself.<sup>8</sup>

The human equation in the black Christian experience is one of the most significant equations. Black theology arises out of the expression of this human equation in the black Christian experience. Black theology was born the moment a black preacher stood and attempted to present a systematic interpretation of the meaning and significance of the Christian faith for the worshipping, witnessing, and proclaiming black community.

Black theology, like any other great idea or movement, was compelled to wait until its time had come. It was implicit in the spirituals and gospel songs of the black witnessing community. It was elucidated and used by the black preachers in the proclamation of the word. The effort to systematize and to present it as a legitimate and formal discipline is a recent innovation.

The rise of black theology was occasioned by the configuration of three contrasting and contradictory movements: the discovery of the depth of racism which exists in the white church establishment; second, the black student movement; and third, the emergence on the American scene of new interpreters of the black experience.

Let us consider the first movement. The life of the white church establishment has been so deeply affected by racism that most of its programs in relation to Blacks were determined by it. The white church establishment was deeply involved in the slave traffic and



the ownership of slaves. The board of directors of the National Committee of Black Churchmen in its statement of May 7, 1969 on Black Power described the historic racist character of the white church establishment in this nation:

Some churches actually owned slaves and many others thrived on the tithes and offerings of both Northern and Southern Churchmen who profited directly and indirectly from the uncompensated labor of the slaves. The white churches and synagogues undeniably have been the moral cement of the structure of racism in this nation and the vast majority of them continue to play that role today.

Historically it can be proved that the white church establishment's involvement in slavery, its promotion of segregation and discrimination have persisted even to today in spite of the subsequent recent development of liberal theology and the ethics of integration which determined the black thrust during the Martin Luther King era.

The white church establishment in many instances has become an instrument of oppression for all Blacks. The white church establishment has failed to confront its members who occupy positions of power to let their behavior in business be determined by the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus. Many of these white laymen who occupy positions of power in the wealthy white church establishment are the owners and managers of business and political structures which have kept black people in a state of deprivation and helplessness. Many of the Whites who are members of the white church establishment who operate real estate businesses refuse to sell to black buyers and effectively keep Blacks from moving into so-called white neighborhoods. Many of the white denominations have large investments in hundreds of American firms which are reaping 19 percent profit from the dehumanization apartheid economics of the Union of South Africa. In addition to this, many white churches own thousands of acres in the South where black sharecroppers desperately in need of land, are being forced into the already crowded ghettos. The white church establishments spend thousands of dollars on contracts for the building of million-dollar sanctuaries by discriminatory businesses and contractors.

The extent of the white church's involvement in the promotion of racist policy becomes immediately obvious when we see the extent of its involvement in economics and politics. The Beirut conference made a special study of this topic and reported its findings. It was proven conclusively that there is a racial bias in the international distribution and ownership of the developed resources of the world today. Eighty percent of the world's resources are at the disposal of

only about 20 percent of the world population, most of whom are white and live in the North Atlantic region. These 20 percent still have and control:

- 90% of the world's income
- 90% of the gold reserves
- 95% of its scientific knowledge
- 70% of its meat
- 80% of its protein

The forecast for the period 1965-70 was that by 1970 the developed countries with a population of 624 million would have a per capita income of \$2,337.50, whereas the less developed countries with a population of 2,400 million would have a per capita income of \$187.50. It was calculated that however fast a developing country might grow relative to its previous poverty, the changes could only be minute when compared with the results of growth within the same period in developed countries of the West.

The developed western and so-called Christian countries of the world have obtained their wealth from centuries of exploitation of the newly-independent and developing countries.

The churches and their members were actively involved in this exploitation and derived much material benefit. Therefore, they have a moral obligation to make restitution through the transfer of these material resources.

Such is the racist character of the white church establishment of this nation—from the National Council of the Churches of Christ down to the smallest white church in the nation.

Second, let us analyze the black student movement. There are approximately 300,000 black students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States, representing about 4 percent of the total student enrollment. Half of these black students are enrolled in black colleges. During the past ten years we have noted a decisive change in the attitudes reflected and the goals sought by black college students. In the middle 1950's to the early 1960's, the black college students marched and worked under the banner of civil rights, inspired and motivated by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The goal then was integration and equality. The struggle for integration and equality was fought on such battlegrounds as Nashville, Montgomery, Selma, Oxford, and New Orleans.

The integrationist black college students were very religious and profoundly influenced by the Gandhian-King idea of passive resistance and nonviolence. Integrationist black students believed in racial cooperation between Whites and Blacks. Their strategy was to be neat, polite, nonviolent, passive, and inoffensive. When they

went to sit-in at a lunch counter, they took their Bibles or copies of the United States Constitution or Plato with them. With shirt, tie, and shoes shined, they attacked the stronghold of segregation and discrimination in this country. They marched and prayed and sang. The theme song was, "We shall overcome some day." The integrationist black students gained the support of many liberal Whites. "Something" very unusual happened. This "something" which happened caused the transition to radicalism. The change in strategy and immediate goals occurred suddenly. The students began to question not only the system, but also their own tactics. Possibly three significant events accounted for this change toward radicalism. The first was a critical review of the progress of the civil rights movement using the tactics of nonviolence. When the integrationist students reviewed the actual progress which had been made during the period of praying, singing, and kneeling, they were made painfully aware of the fact that the basic institutions of this country remain segregated. The second event which prompted a change in methods and tactics occurred in 1964 when the delegates of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention were rebuffed. On the heels of this rebuff followed the trauma of the Mississippi summer—the temporary migration of white northern students to the South to work for civil rights. Third, the overall disappointment in the progress made using the tactics of nonviolence led students to question their own tactics and the system against which they were fighting. They also reached a new conclusion about the nature of the system; namely, that the system itself was illegitimate.

The illegitimacy of the system was articulated by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, and the black college student developed a new vocabulary. He began to use such words as "institutional racism," "the system," "black power," "black independence," "black pride," and "black studies."

The black students' movement and the goals which they sought have now been changed and the revolt has been redefined. The black students have selected new battlegrounds. The aim of the student vanguard is black independence and the prevailing cry is black pride. The battlegrounds have changed. The colleges and universities are the new battlegrounds. The aim has changed. During the middle 50's and on into the middle 60's the black students were concerned with integration and social equality. Today there has been a shift. The black students are now concerned with a reorientation of the thinking of all Blacks. Today the black college student accepts the fact of his blackness. Blackness is now interpreted as a gift of God. It is a gift to be embraced. The black college student is determined

to dewhitenize himself and he refuses to be made into a little, middle-class black Sambo.

When the question is asked, What do these black students want? it is impossible to give an answer which will be universally accepted. Possibly the following answers may be considered as safe generalizations. Black college students want to claim their own identity. They want to know something about their own history, the contributions made by Blacks, first to American culture and second to world history, to the arts, science, literature, and religion. Educationally they want a curriculum that will help them to acquire skills and at the same time emphasize their own identity as Blacks. They want institutions that will let them control their own lives and they no longer desire to be a dark imitation of Whites. Black college students are determined to be both black and skilled at the same time. They are seeking to develop and to keep a sense of group identity.

The black student movement is an uprising against the oppression which confronts Blacks living in a white-oriented world. With the black studies program, the black student confronts a racist system of education and makes impossible and radical demands of it. The demand is to have the right to organize as Blacks, to transform the admission procedures so as to allow black young people to enter the major colleges and universities of this nation. Black studies programs are a demand for the restructuring of the academic curriculum and a redefinition of the university's relationship to the black community. This program is not only a challenge to the educational structures of colleges and universities, but to the total American society. When the black studies concept is extended to the American society, it suggests the necessity of black control over all policies which determine the role, function, and place of Blacks in that society. It insists that white racist Americans are not capable or qualified to make choices and decisions for Blacks. The extension of the black studies program into the nation as a whole means that Blacks will seek the critical role of determining the policies which define their participation in that society.

The black student movement is also a cry for justice from the disinherited. The privileged white racist society calls for law and order, knowing that law and order as interpreted by Whites never serves the disinherited, only the privileged. The black students know that when law and order serves for purposes of exploitation the cry for justice may demand disorder.

The black student movement contends that Blacks cannot and should not enter the mainstream of American life without transforming that mainstream. They argue that the mainstream of American life is deeply poisoned in its content, cancerous in its nature, and

dangerous in the direction of its flow. The mainstream of American life and thought needs purification and redirection. The purification of this mainstream requires the active participation of self-affirming Blacks in every institution of American society, from the federal government on out, transforming and purifying as it goes. It means that Blacks would force a change in America's repressive and exploitative relationship to the rest of the nonwhite world. America thus purified would no longer send its sons to fight the world's poor in the name of freedom and on behalf of a white racist world. It means the end of poverty and a redefining and reshaping of all American institutions so as to provide a significant place for the black experience and the black perspective. America purified would regain its moral leadership of the world. What the black students are saying through their emphasis upon black studies is that America's ultimate hope is to have a renewed surge of black men and women transforming now what must be transformed totally if we ourselves are to live in health and truth. It is the conviction of the black youth of the land that radical life-affirming change in America may have to follow black leadership and black directions.

The third cause of the emergence of black theology is the rise of the new breed, the new interpreters of the black experience—Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Ron Karenga to mention three. Possibly the most perceptive interpreter of the black experience is Malcolm X. While the black community was engaged in the movement typified by the word integration, Malcolm X pointed out to us, though we did not hear him, the way the white church establishment was using integration as an instrument of oppression against the black man. Integration within the white church was exposed as a fraud by Malcolm X and the whole citadel of moral rectitude which undergirded the philosophy of integration as a goal for a democratic society began to crumble.

Malcolm X pointed out to the black community that the desperate entreaties of black leaders such as King, Wilkins, Farmer, and Young were falling on deaf ears in the white community and that only token responses had been made. For the most part the structure of government, the white church establishment, the individual Christians or Jews did not make an honest commitment to integration and racial justice for the Blacks of this nation. There is anger in the voice of Malcolm X when he shouts:

No sane white man really wants integration! No sane black man really believes that the white man ever will give the black man anything more than token integration . . . the only way the black people caught up in this society can be saved is not to *integrate* into this corrupt society, but to *separate* from it.<sup>9</sup>

Malcolm X's pronouncement and verdict on the Christianity of the white church establishment is no less severe. He believed, as his statement will indicate, that the "Christianity" of the white church establishment is the creation of the white man. He declares:

Christianity is the white man's religion. The Holy Bible in the white man's hands and his interpretations of it have been the greatest single ideological weapon for enslaving millions of non-white human beings. Every country the white man has conquered with his guns, he has always paved the way, and salved his conscience, by carrying the Bible and interpreting it to call the people "heathens" and "pagans"; then he sends his guns, then his missionaries behind the guns to mop up.<sup>10</sup>

Malcolm X had revealed integration as practiced by the white-dominated society as a strategy of grand deception. The Christianity of the white church establishment was declared to be the creation of the white man.

Fortunately, Malcolm X had a new word to say about the possibility of integration, the unity and true brotherhood that he had seen during his religious pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964. Let Malcolm X speak for himself.

At Mecca I saw the spirit of unity and true brotherhood displayed by tens of thousands of people from all over the world, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. This served to convince me that perhaps some American whites can also be cured of the rampant racism which is consuming them and about to destroy that country.<sup>11</sup>

Even more significant, Malcolm X was able to define the goal of twenty-two million Afro-Americans. He writes:

The common goal of 22 million Afro-Americans is respect as human beings, the God-given right to be a human being. Our common goal is to obtain the human rights that America has been denying us. We can never get civil rights in America until human rights are first restored. We will never be recognized as citizens there until we are first recognized as humans.<sup>12</sup>

The civil rights movement was premature according to Malcolm X, because it was based upon two false assumptions. The civil rights movement assumed in the first place that the white man accepted the humanity of the black man and second, that the humanity of the white man could be redeemed and restored through appeals to conscience and the strength of a nonviolent love. Both assumptions were erroneous according to Malcolm X. Malcolm X contends that the black man's task is to develop his own humanity,

to embrace it, to enrich it, to identify it, to possess it, to honor it and to be proud of it without consideration of the regard that the white man may have of it. The resources of the black man and of the black community must be committed to the development and enrichment of black humanity.

Malcolm X had defined the theological task for black scholars. Integration is a possibility. The Christian faith as interpreted by white scholars must be critically examined and evaluated by black scholars. If an examination of the Christian faith as interpreted by white scholars was found to be corrupt, the black scholar would be compelled to interpret the Christian faith for the black community in such a manner that it would deal with the basic problem confronting the black man today, which is oppression.

The pronouncements of Malcolm X fell like a bombshell on the playground of integrationist black theoreticians. His ideas were like hand grenades which were thrown into the marches of Blacks singing, "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, someday," causing disturbance, confusion, and complete disarray. The reactions to Malcolm X's ideas occasioned disbelief, shock, rage, and anger in the black community. To many Blacks in the early 1960's he was thought to be a mad man, introducing a discordant note into the beautiful symphony of integration. This note the black man did not want to hear. Many Blacks attempted to ignore Malcolm X. Others sought to discredit him. Still others who had no sympathy with what he said but were greatly disturbed were forced to ask these questions: Suppose Malcolm X is correct in what he is saying? Suppose Malcolm X has given a true analysis of the black man's plight in America? What then? The ideas of Malcolm X must be faced. Even though it took four assassinations—Malcolm X, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy—Malcolm X could not be denied his day or the day of confrontation could not be postponed any longer.

Black scholars were forced to read Malcolm X, to hear his speeches, to seriously attempt to understand what he was saying, and to do this with an open mind. It is difficult to explain the agony experienced by some persons during this process. We were shocked and amazed when forced to admit that Malcolm X had given a fairly accurate analysis of the black man's plight in America. Though many of his pronouncements were extreme and needed toning down, the essential truth when separated from the rhetoric confronted us with all of its clarity and power. The truth which we had discovered in Malcolm X forced us to read "white theology" with new minds and through new eyes. Here again, the black scholar was astounded at what he discovered when white theology was read and a whole new set of questions were forced on it. Es-

entially this is what we discovered about white theology. Black students who had studied at white seminaries and who had entered deeply in a serious study of white theology discovered that these white theologians had described the substance and had elucidated a contemporary faith for the white man. These white scholars knew nothing about the black Christian experience, and to many of them, this black Christian experience was illegitimate and inauthentic.

White theologians did not appreciate nor understand the "soul" expressed in the religion of the black man—his religious style, warmth, compassion, practical wisdom, artistic and emotional freedom. The religious services of the black man were emotional, warm with shouts of "Amen," "Hallelujah," "Thank you Jesus," and "Praise God." The black man felt the spirit and gave vent to his feelings. The black preacher developed his own christological categories and he declared to the congregations who Jesus was—"Bread in a starving land," "Water in dry places," "The Rose of Sharon," "the Lily of the valley," and "the bright and morning Star." These were dismissed by white theologians as clichés, void of meaning and empty of content. The white theologians' style of life which is structured, ordered, unfeeling, scientific, and objective did not equip him with the tools or the capacity to enter into the warm and vibrant world of the religious experience of the black man.

The programmatic task for the black scholar is both clear and urgent. Even though the rise of black theology was occasioned by the three movements discussed, there is one basic and underlined cause—the black man's opposition to oppression and his quest for freedom and liberation. In this new struggle for basic human rights, black Americans were to examine and explore the depths of the black Christian experience. This black Christian experience had enabled the black man to survive the brutalities and oppression which a white racist society had inflicted on him. It enabled black men to affirm themselves as members of the kingdom of God and provided the strength needed to survive every conceivable form of oppression. Through this experience black men affirmed their humanity even though it was despised and degraded. So, in a real sense, black theology was already present in the black spirituals, the black witnessing community, and the exhortations of the black preacher.

Black theology is a theology of liberation. It seeks to plumb the conditions of black men in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black theology is also a systematic interpretation of the meaning and significance of the Christian faith for the worshipping, witnessing, and proclaiming Christian community. It is Christian theology because it utilizes God's revelation in Jesus Christ as the point of departure and norm.



It is rather queer that strenuous objections are raised in certain sections of the black and white communities and disapproval of the emerging discipline of black theology. This opposition may be due to an unconscious deep-seated rejection of everything that is connected with blackness. This could be a product of social conditioning in this country. Every racial group that has embraced the Christian faith has attempted to express what the faith did to the group and what the group did to the faith. As a result of this activity, many expressions of the Christian faith have appeared: Jewish Christian experience, gentile Christian experience, African Christian experience, English Christian experience, German Christian experience, and Anglo-Saxon Christian experience. Systems of theologies have been articulated and developed using these various experiences as the data for theological reflections. The black Christian experience is another expression of the Christian faith as that faith was appropriated by this racial group.

The black Christian experience provides the data for theological reflection and construction. The dark past has provided black Americans with faith, hope, courage, and insights. Black Americans have experienced reality at its depths. They have known and experienced humiliation and exaltation, defeat and victory, suffering and healing, anxiety and peace, troubles and triumphs, death and life. The black Christian experience challenges black scholars to examine, study, and systematize it so as to discover what this experience teaches about the fundamental problems of human existence and the basic matters of the Christian faith.

Through the black Christian experience, black Americans have come to know God, or rather to be known by him in a most unique way. God for the black witnessing community is Creator, Redeemer, All-powerful and knowing, merciful, patient, Ultimate Reality, and Ground of being. God is this and something more for black Americans. God is the One who is, the All-sufficient One, the Enabler, the Provider, the Sustainer, and the righteous and victorious One.

Jesus Christ is for the black witnessing Christian community, Son of God, Son of Man, Suffering Servant, the Logos, the Christ, Integrative Personality, Cosmic Mind, Unique Idea. But to and for the black man Jesus is Jew, the barrier of a common humanity. His divinity consists in his services and ministry of liberation. Jesus is the liberator who releases the captives, declares good news to the poor by word and event. He is the liberator who invades the chambers of darkness and gives light, attacks the strongholds of oppression, casts down corrupt establishments, and rends the systems. Because of this man black Americans know who they are, how they ought to live, where they came from, where they are going, and for what causes they must live and die. Black Americans must imitate this

man, follow in his steps. May they do on their Calvaries what the man Jesus did on his. Let black Americans rend the veil and provide a ministry of reconciliation and liberation for the rich and poor, learned and ignorant, strong and weak, high and low, black and white. May all men with open faces behold the glory of God as revealed through black humanity. Let black Americans through the ministry of reconciliation and liberation quake the earth and rend the rocks of oppression, exploitation, greed, hatred, and racism. May old erroneous prejudicial and racial ideologies be shattered and a great heaving in the hearts and minds occur. May there be severing of old lines of thought—producing a mighty change in the economic, political, social, and religious orders of the world. Let black Americans through their ministry of reconciliation and liberation open the graves in which men have entombed themselves and set free the minds and spirits too long imprisoned. Let black Americans release into the world the liberating and reconciling powers of the man Jesus, to the extent that men will say of them what they said of him: "Truly, these are the sons of God."

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